

Sermon for the baptism of Eddie Verreneault  
Sept. 22, 2019  
Saint James, Wheat Ridge

Raise your hand if you were baptized as an infant or young child.  
Raise your hands if you were baptized as a teen or adult.  
If you haven't been baptized, hang in there and hear me out.

In the Episcopal Church both infant baptism and adult baptism are recognized.

That means, it doesn't matter how old you are,  
and it doesn't matter whether you are sprinkled, dipped, or dunked.  
It's all good – it's all acceptable.

And today, it's our great privilege to be baptizing young Eddie Verreneault.  
Given that happy occasion,  
Today is a good day to talk about just what baptism is,  
and what it means.

Baptism is one of two great sacraments we observe in the Episcopal Church.  
The other is Holy Communion.  
A sacrament is traditionally defined  
as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.  
It demonstrates the reality, claimed by the church,  
that in life and in death we belong to God.

In a few minutes, when we baptize Eddie,  
As the water trickles down his head,  
We will sense that a remarkable,  
almost magical act has taken place.

But is there really some divine magic that happens at our baptism?  
Does God do something in that moment that somehow changes who we are?

We know that baptism doesn't magically change us from sinners to saints.  
So, what actually does change in baptism?  
I'm going to suggest that nothing changes.....  
and yet, everything changes.

In the gospel lesson we just heard,

Baptism marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.  
But more than that, baptism is a transforming, spiritual experience for Jesus.

When Jesus emerges from the waters of the Jordan  
God's voice from heaven declares....  
this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.  
Mark is describing the moment that Jesus  
comes to full conscious awareness and acceptance of his identity  
and his purpose.  
Because it is only when he recognizes who he is  
that he can then embrace what he is to do  
and accomplish with his life.

And so it is, or should be, with us.  
**Our** vocation, our work, our purpose in life flows from **our** identity –  
that is, who we believe ourselves to be.

Jesus had an *Aha* moment during his baptism –  
a moment when he fully and consciously understood  
who he was as God's beloved son.

But what only takes a couple of verses for Jesus,  
takes us an entire lifetime.  
It takes a lifetime of "aha's" –  
of discovering again and again who *we* are  
as *God's beloved* -  
to understand that **our** calling,  
**our** human vocation,  
becomes clear when we really accept *our* identity  
as beloved child of God.

So, Baptism may not be about God snatching us out of sinfulness.  
Baptism is not about washing us clean  
in order to make us acceptable to God.  
It is about publicly celebrating that we already are.  
Eddie's baptism today celebrates the reality  
that even before we can acknowledge it,  
we are already *immersed* in God,  
and beloved by God.

How many of you remember *Toy Story 2*?  
 So many preachable moments in that movie!  
 In the movie, Woody, the little cowboy doll,  
 is kidnapped and taken to the home of the “evil” toy collector.  
 Woody finds himself in a dark room, all alone.  
 He manages to escape from the box he was put in,  
 but he doesn’t know where he is or what he should do.

At that moment, Jessie, the little cowgirl doll,  
 sees Woody and recognizes him.  
 She yells with delight, “Woody! It’s you, it’s you, it’s you!”  
 Bullseye, the horse, and the Prospector recognize Woody too  
 and are thrilled to see him.  
 But Woody, couldn't figure out why or how they knew him.

The Prospector finally asks,  
 “You don’t know who you are, do you?”  
 Then Bullseye flips the light switch,  
 and they show Woody the room filled with “Woody memorabilia.”  
 He discovers that he was the most famous of movie star toys.  
 It was **Woody’s** “aha” moment,  
 when he recognized that *he*, Woody, is someone famous,  
 someone who is adored by thousands of children.

When this congregation makes a covenant in baptism  
 To do all in our power to support Eddie and his family in their life in Christ,  
 we become much like Woody’s friends,  
 helping not just Eddie but ALL baptized persons  
 to discover their identity as children of God  
 and helping us all to live like the beloved children we are.

Look around you;  
 this sacred space is filled with **our** Christian memorabilia –  
 our stories, our rituals and sacraments,  
 our sacred music and art, and our friends....our spiritual companions.  
 All these things shape us  
 and we in turn shape our community.

I said earlier that what happens in just a few verses for Jesus,  
 takes us a lifetime.

It is true.

We are baptized only once,  
because baptism celebrates something that is already true.  
God's divine claim on the world never ceases to be true,  
**but** that reality and its implications  
break into our consciousness with new power and new insight  
over and over throughout our lives.

We are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection.  
And death and resurrection define the very nature of our lives.  
As we grow ... as we experience life with its pain, mistakes, losses,  
as well as its challenges, accomplishments, and celebrations,  
we change,  
which means our old self-image must die.  
If we are open, we can be set free, renewed, *resurrected* again and again,  
to a more complete understanding of who we are.

Today, I invite each of you to remember who YOU are –  
that you are immersed in God –  
and you are beloved.  
This is the good news.

We don't *become* a child of God at our baptism –  
baptism is the ritual that announces and celebrates that truth.  
From our birth to our death  
we are immersed in the divine mystery,  
which is far deeper and richer than we can think or speak.

Remember your baptism ....  
remember who you are ....  
live as the beloved.

Amen