

As we celebrate the Baptism of Adeline this morning, I think it is appropriate that we take a moment to dwell briefly on what Baptism is meant to convey to us.

Most obviously, baptism signals our adoption into God's family. We become officially part of a family of faith in which God is the parent. We call God our Father, in accordance with tradition. But ultimately God is both the ultimate father and the ultimate mother to us all.

### **Family Structure**

And as with any family, the parents set some ground rules. In God's family, the ten commandments provide guidelines for our shared behavior. Members of God's household are to avoid such things as bearing false witness or stealing and are to treat their earthly parents with the proper respect.

### **Covenant**

And the basic commitment that holds the family together and underlies these commandments is the "covenant" promise which God has made

with us to watch over and care for us. And in turn we are to honor God, in part by caring for each other.

These covenantal relationships are an expression of God's love for us. God's love is the Holy Spirit that animates and gives strength to our lives, filling them with a sacred meaning, in a way that holds us together through all of life's ups and downs.

### **Cross and Resurrection**

The central way we understand this covenant as Christians is through the story of Jesus's journey to the cross and his resurrection. The cross Jesus bore and that we bear when we follow him, is the burden of caring for others. And as faithful followers of Jesus, we go through a life journey which involves letting go of our self-interested lives and embracing a life devoted to sharing in God's love for others. In other words, we die to our old selves and are raised to a new life with Christ. And in the process, we discover that this new life is the true life that we were made to live.

This journey is symbolically represented in the ritual of baptism. Today we splashed a little water on the head of Adeline to signify that this is the life and promise that lies ahead of her. But in Jesus's day and in

some places today, the baptized were fully immersion underwater, in a way that much more dramatically symbolizes death by drowning. And when their heads came up out of the water, and they gasped for air, this also much more dramatically symbolized resurrection.

So these are two key things that baptism represents. It represents our membership in the family of God and it represents the nature of the life we will live as members of God's family.

### **Infant or Small Child Baptism**

One of the questions that arises is, "What if you are too young to understand these things? Can baptism have meaning for our lives, when we are not yet able to understand what is happening or even why we are being baptized?"

First we should probably admit that none of us is able to grasp the full measure of God's grace. We are all, in a sense God's children, and always will be uncomprehending children in the eyes of God.

But it is also true that, as we participate in the ups and downs of life in God's family, our grasp of what it means to die and be raised with Jesus increases over time. We discover that learning to love as God loves requires courage, involves suffering, and self-denial, even a dying to

oneself. But we also discover that, in the journey of learning how to love, there is a joy and liberation that defies understanding and that deepens and ennobles us.

### **Hindsight**

Only in hindsight do we recognize the way the grace of God has prepared us and blessed our lives. Only in hindsight do we truly recognize how important for our own formation were all the attempts to love us well that were made by those who surrounded us, when we were still young and unaware.

And now that we recognize how precious is a gift of grace their love has been for us, we too want to watch over and care for those in the next generation, and raise them in accordance with the ways of the household of faith, so that they too may share with us in the wondrous legacy of joy that connects the saints of every age

Baptism, therefore also symbolizes our dependence on grace and the life of faith for both child and adult alike. Because faith, in itself, is not really based on foreknowledge of how things will unfold. Faith is foremost about having a child-like trust that God will take care of us

and lead us to that place where every true prayer will be given its fullest and best answer.

There is a poem that I like, which expresses our dependence on grace very nicely, especially when we recognize it in hindsight. The poem is very overused, and the version I am reading is not very “poetically” worded. But I would like to read it anyway, as the conclusion to this sermon. It is called “Footsteps in the Sand.”

One night I dreamed a dream.  
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.  
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.  
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,  
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,  
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,  
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,  
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.  
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,  
You'd walk with me all the way.  
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of  
my life,  
there was only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave  
me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you  
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.  
When you saw only one set of footprints,  
It was then that I carried you."

Indeed, whether we are aware of it or not, God carries us today. And,  
through us, God is carrying Adeline, making sure she is fed and  
nurtured and given a good start, during this early period of her life  
when she is most vulnerable and, as yet oblivious to the true meaning  
and purpose of her life, which will grow more apparent as God reveals  
it to her.

May God bless and watch over all his children, baptized and  
unbaptized, young and old and unite us all in in the realm of his grace  
and mercy.