

Sermon Isaiah 42:1-9 Matthew 3:13-17 January 13, 2008  
Baptized - Born Again - Our Greatest Joy

The ancient catechism asks the question...

It's a very good question at anytime, but an especially good question for this season of Presidential Primary politics - and this week of Michigan Political Shinanigans... We are Electing delegates who've been told they won't be seated At the convention because Michigan is breaking party rules...

I didn't know there even were Party rules? I wonder if there is anything in there about positive campaigning, and only legal contributions, or no special interests, like free health care, for legislatures. Maybe not voting Tuesday in this phantom primary would send more of a message than voting...

But - back to the question... It was - it is -

What is your only comfort in life and in death? What is your only comfort in life and in death? And the answer..... ?

Well - the answer is not any of the candidates for election. Our only hope is not Huckabee, or Romney, or McCain, or Hillary or Edwards, or Ron Paul...

Though I like a lot of what that crazy man says. Maybe 50 years married to the same woman has simply driven some common sense deep into his very being.

But the answer to the question - what is your only comfort in life and in death - is - and you know it - even if you don't know the creed from which it comes. -

Our only comfort in life and in death is - Jesus Christ. That we belong body and soul to Jesus Christ....

Not our best comfort, or our major hope, or our last hope..... our ONLY comfort and hope in life and in death is Jesus Christ. And that's why we sing Joy to the world at Christmas, in celebration of his birth. Joy to the world - the Lord is come - our only comfort.....

But - is he, is this Jesus, this only comfort for you, for us all, in life and in death, is This Jesus Lord of your life? Is his teaching, his way of life, his self-giving love, his forgiving spirit, your guide for the way you live your life?

If asked, who are you, for example, would you say first?..... What would you say first? That you are - Scottish, or Polish, or an American, or male or female, of black or white - or would you say that you are a Christian?

Are you - in other words - are you - who you seem to have been born to be -  
OR - are you who you were born again to be? Who are you, and what  
difference does it make - who you say that you are?

Let us pray...

Lord of this day, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your loving  
and faithful people, be acceptable to you and your good word to us in Christ, Amen.

Who am I? Who are you? In your baptism, and mine, it was said that we belong  
to God through Jesus Christ. It was said that we are identified with Jesus Christ,  
symbolically dying, as he died, going under the water, and then rising as he  
rose, to new life.

In our baptism we are identified with Jesus Christ - with the new death defeating  
power that was in him, and that through him can be in us. That's why Baptism is  
the way by which we become part of the Christian Church, the Body of Christ.  
Baptized like him we are made one with him.

We just sang this... "Baptized in water, sealed by the spirit, dead in the tomb with  
Christ our king, one with his rising, freed and forgiven, thankfully now God's  
praises we sing."

I'm pretty sure that's why Baptist churches, for example, cling so strongly to  
Baptism by Immersion. Baptism in a tank, or a river, or a lake or a swimming  
pool... Somewhere where a person can be dunked... in effect be drowned to  
death, and Be raised up cleansed to new life.

And there is power in that symbolism. Especially if the preacher, who baptizes,  
really wants to get the point across by holding you under until the first bubbles  
come to the surface... and you know more about death and new life.

Maybe - just maybe - we need to use our Lake more - in order to get the point.

Because we pretty dry Presbyterians pretty much don't get the point.

When I ask new members if Presbyterians are born again people, almost  
everyone says - for sure - NO. And they are wrong.

Because we are - born again - and it is, ought to be, our greatest joy in life.

But - Born into the world - we really do learn to live for the world, and all we can  
get out of the world ... before we die.... We join the rush with everyone else  
for the most, the best, the greatest latest that the world can sell us...

UNLESS - AND UNTIL - we meet Jesus Christ, or He meets us. Then our lives change. Because, in Christ, as Christ's persons, as Christians, we live first and for most, not for this world as it is, but we seek to do God's will on earth as it is in heaven. That's our call.. Even if it may not quite yet be our calling... or our calling card.

We know - we know - our only hope in life and in death is Jesus Christ - who said - *Whoever lives and believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*

That's the promise of our baptism.... Sprinkled or splashed or dipped - the symbol is that we are Drowned down to death... and then - raised up, cleansed and born anew, again, to new life.

It is a powerful symbol - but - do we have to get all wet to get the point? To remember, really remember, who we are and what we believe. That eternal life is God's gift to those who believe in God, all who believe in God. And - because we believe in Jesus Christ as God's son and our savior, we are counted in.

By faith, through Baptism, We are born anew as forever children of God. Do we need to get all wet - or do we just need to get it through our heads and Hearts - that this is true.

That our only hope in life and in death is Jesus Christ - the crucified, dead and buried, and risen again Lord of life. And... to say it all that way.... It does make sense... doesn't it. We are born, we live, we die. And it all can seem so flat and final. Dust to dust, and ashes to ashes.

Ten times in the last 3 weeks those words or ones like them, have been said for members or family members of our church. Two times yesterday. Born. Live. Die. Dead and done. No....

Because the beat of life goes on - long before our heart beats join in - and long after our heart beats stop. The beat goes on. And we can choose to live life flat and final - or - we can respond to the call in Christ to live life tall and forever.

It's why we sing at the celebration of our Resurrection - at memorial services here. *Joyful, Joyful We Adore, God Glory Lord of love, hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the Son above, Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the dark of doubt away, giver of immortal gladness Fill us with the light of day....*

Isaiah declared the promise of God to us ... and the choice

*"Thus says God, who created the heavens, who gives breath to the people, and spirit to those who live - I have called you to righteousness - see the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare..."*

And that promise we believe was fulfilled in Jesus Christ - In him we see God's will being done on earth as in heaven... He broke the power of sin and death - by his purity of purpose, by his sacrifice of love on a cross, and by his resurrection.

And he calls us, through his Church, to live into that hope - of a world made better by the lives of people who know in their baptism that they are already born a new in Christ as God's forever children.

Baptized - we are called to live life - not - as flat and final, but as tall and forever. It is, in a large measure what drives the Hospice Movement... deeply Christian in its roots.

Hospice does not fight to draw or drag a person's life out to its longest earthly end - whatever the effort. Because it works with the understanding that in Christ, and through Christ we move from life to life.

Hospice at its best takes seriously the words I've said so many times this month....  
*Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth... God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear  
I am the resurrection and the life - who ever believes in me, though he were dead,  
Yet shall he live - and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.*

Our only hope in life and death is Jesus Christ - Our risen Lord and Savior. IN this life, Christ is our hope, and our strength, our guardian and our guide. And even as he fed the hungry and clothed the naked and healed the sick, so can we... And when we do, we help to seal our relationship to Christ, and through him to eternal life.

The prophet Isaiah said - I have given you as a light to the nations - and Jesus' call to us all is to let our light shine - so people may see our good works and give thanks to God. In Christ, through Christ, We are born again - born into this kind of Christ like living, born - really - in Christ and through Christ, into eternal life - What Joy is ours - now... and forever. Amen.

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