

Lectionary 14—Proper 9
4th Sunday after Pentecost

We are invited to worship by the tower bells, calling us 5 minutes prior to our 10:15 a.m.'s service beginning. Preludes to worship used to be just that, a call to enter sanctuary and prepare hearts and minds for worship. Now preludes are a part of worship proper, so the sound of the organ or piano or choir is a strong cue worship has begun, though the prelude still helps us prepare.

Following the prelude, three things are named, suggesting that a change in environment has taken place. Away from the world cost and price, contempt and withholding, possession and ownership, we hear of grace, love, and spiritual communion, not only with one another, but through the Holy Spirit, communion with all the saints.

And following the prelude and greeting, we give thanks for baptism, that means of grace, love, and communion through which the Trinity claims us for the great vision of *the reign of God*. "Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism..." Joined to Christ, we are joined to the Father and the Spirit, One God.

And having given thanks for baptism, we sing a confessional song of Easter, We Know That Christ Is Raised. This hymn by John Geyer and Charles Stanford, both born in the early 1920s, sings of sharing in water and sharing in "his saving death." Reborn, our despair is turned to "blazing joy." In stanza 3, Geyer writes of the Spirit's fission shaking the church of God. We most often associate the word fission with nuclear bombs, do we not? The word suggests power, not of the world or human engineering, but of the Spirit! And again, "...baptized, we live with God." The prelude, greeting, thanksgiving, and hymn signal a coming baptism, the baptism of Bishop; a baptism in which "a new creation comes to life and grows" as expressed in stanza 4.

And, the Prayer of the Day offers its images to the mix: "City that shelters us," "mother that comforts us," "life's journey," and "that we may spread your peace." The last phrase cues the aware listener to a baptismal commission, "and work for justice and peace." (p.3) How odd that we commission even infants and toddlers in the work of God in the world! The first phrase, "city that shelters us" is linked to our first reading from Isaiah, as is imagery of mother, "that you may nurse and be satisfied for her consoling breast." (Is. 66:11) Additionally, "as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you" (66:13) offers feminine imagery not used as often as masculine imagery in Scripture, but it is there more frequently than we think.

Following the Prayer of the Day, children are invited forward to the font, to watch and listen for cues about their own baptisms. They'll help pour water and receive an anointing cross on their foreheads just as Bishop will receive one as a part of baptism. Mary Kay Kates will assist.

This baptism begins as Bishop is presented, responsibilities are shared, and promises are made by parents, sponsors, and you and me! Together we share the Church's Creed, emphatically renouncing all that draws us from God. In the Creed's format of question and answer, many of us remember our days of Confirmation, when baptism was affirmed in us. A candle is lit. A blanket shared. A medal offered and the blessing of "sealing" Bishop with oil.

Then, the hymn Thy Holy Wings is sung, with particular attention to stanza 3, "Oh, wash me in the waters," and stanza 2 line 4, "for I am but a newborn and need thy tender care."

As the baptismal walk concludes, we hear from the Prophet Isaiah, the Psalmist, the Apostle Paul, and Jesus according to St. Luke. The Gospel Acclamation is sung to a melody you may not immediately remember. The Acclamation melody is from Setting 8 of ELW. The "Hallelujah" refrain of the opening hymn is sounded again as "Alleluia, Alleluia"!

The sermon that follows is a playful celebration of the "earthen vessels" we are as aspiring followers of Jesus. (Of course this is only Tuesday!)

As we prepare to commune, a seldom used Preface is sung. The Preface for Healing includes a wonderful line, "Who raises us to life on his healing wings," a reminder of our Baptismal hymn, Thy Holy Wings. As we commune, we'll relax into the familiar hymn, Amazing Grace, ELW 191. To accentuate Christ's baptismal call and gifting of talents to each and all of us, we sing, Now Thank We All Our God, another familiar and joy-filled hymn.

Russ gets the last word regarding baptism: "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." To which we respond, "Thanks be to God."

Hope to see you Sunday, July 7, 2019, 10:15 am or sooner!

Pastor Kim Stover

Baptism of Bishop Price, son of Alexandria (Sanderlin) and Shawn Price, San Diego, California.