

## Sermon 9 29 & 30 18

I am not going to refer to our readings today because we have a baptism today. The story of Esther is compelling and inspiring. St. James is direct and to the point: "You got a problem? You are surrounded by community of people who can help you. Seek out that help." And our quote from the Gospel is particularly reassuring. "... no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me." When we speak and act in Jesus' name, we are his. We are protected by him. Jesus knew who he was and he knew the power he held and still holds. Baptism is a deed of power done in his name.

But I cannot tell you how happy I am that today we are baptizing little Luke James Cavanaugh. There's enough going on in the world right now to divide us, but baptisms are wonderful, something wonderful that we can all celebrate – together. And we need to do that.

And how did little Luke's baptism *today* came about? Well he is a gift from God – in more ways than one. This last Thursday I was sitting in my office, ready to tell MaryAnne to go ahead and print our programs and then I got a phone call. It was Luke's Mommy and she asked, "I think we're supposed to have one more meeting before Luke's baptism, and since it's Thursday and his baptism is on Sunday, welllllll?"

Yikes!

We had had our first meeting waaay back in June, and he couldn't be baptized when his family initially wanted it to happen because that was Homecoming Sunday, so we'd changed the day – and by this time I'm thumbing through my calendar aannnd, I hadn't written it down! And that was June and this is September!

Yikes is right!

But you know? Sometimes God *arrives*, at just the right moment. And little Luke is a blessing. And his mother is a blessing for calling me. We found all of his information. And the Altar Guild got everything together – God bless the Altar Guild – and we're all ready to open our arms wide and receive him.

Baptism is one of the sacraments of our church. It is a sacrament of admission and adoption. St. Paul tells us we are adopted by God, into the great family of the Church. A sacrament is a sacred act – an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace. The

Roman church has seven sacraments and we have them too! Baptism, the Eucharist (Communion), Confirmation, Reconciliation (which used to be called Confession), Anointing of the Sick, Marriage, and Ordination. But the Episcopal church considers Baptism and the Eucharist the most important sacraments because Jesus gave them to us and we can read about them in the Bible.

Baptism had long been practiced by Jews before it became the central action of John the Baptist's ministry. It signified cleansing, being cleansed of sins. It is very much that for Baptists. I started out as a Baptist. I was baptized at about age 11. I had to be old enough to go to my minister and ask to be baptized. Baptists will often not recognize any other faith's baptism. So someone joining the Baptist church would have to be baptized again.

For a Baptist baptism you are publicly immersed – dunked – by your pastor. I have to say, once you're been dunked, you *know* you've been baptized. Baptists allow and sometimes encourage rebaptism. I knew a woman who used to get baptized once a year! She just liked it, I guess. We Episcopalians follow the belief of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." We only do it once. If you change churches, your new church *receives* you, honoring your baptism.

We no longer do private baptisms unless the person is near death. We always baptize in the context of a worship service with Eucharist. That is because we need the congregation here. We need you here as witnesses. As we receive Luke into the Household of God, we *witness* his adoption. Thereby, we *all* baptize him.

You can be baptized at any age. In fact, I have baptized a mother and her daughter at the same time. That was exciting. If you have never been baptized and you want to be, I invite you to come on up in a few minutes! Baptism isn't the end of a spiritual journey. It is often the beginning at whatever age a person is baptized.

In the early middle ages infant baptism became common, mainly because at that time people believed you had to be baptized before you died and infant mortality was so common.

On the other hand, in the age of Constantine, many believed that once you were baptized, you could never sin again. As a young St. Augustine prayed, "Lord, make me chaste, but not yet." Constantine waited until he was on his deathbed to be baptized so he could get all his sinning in.

Everybody's always lookin' for an angle.

The Roman Church used to believe that the souls of infants who died before baptism went to Limbo. Then their relatives prayed and gave lots of money to the Church and bought their way into paradise. Horrifying. A rather unsavory way to enter into eternity, if you ask me. Luckily, the Roman Church has done away with Limbo.

There are lots of different ways to be baptized. Immersion, (the Dunk), affusion, when we pour water over the head, as I will for Luke, with a silver seashell. Or aspersion, sprinkling. We have a lovely little silver wand here at Good Shepherd. It has holes in the end of it. On certain special occasions, like the night before Easter Sunday, at the Vigil, I bring the asperger out and dip it into the dish, which is filled with holy water. Then I flip the asperger around and sprinkle as many of you as I can. I always aim for Jason. And I generally get him too. And of course, it's always fun to sprinkle the kids – wake 'em up a little.

And what kind of priest would I be if I missed the choir?

Baptism is a joyous occasion. It is a sacrament of rebirth, of cleansing, of belonging, of recognition that there is something, someone greater than us, a being beyond our understanding – God - who loves us no matter what – unconditionally. Think that over. No matter who you are. No matter what you've done. You are loved un-con-ditionally.

And as we welcome little Luke into our midst we need to remind ourselves and him of God's unconditional love every single day of all our lives.