

“Uncovering Who We Really Are”

- Recently, my son Gaius bought this toy at Target that promised a gem stone
 - The catch was, besides the mystery of which gemstone you may actually receive
 - Was that it was encased in a hard, blue, sand-like material
 - And along with this hard, protective, sand shell that held a precious gemstone within, it came with a tiny hammer and saw
 - The idea is that a kid with lots of energy could spend an entire day hammering and chiseling away at this hard chunk of sand
 - And eventually excavate and uncover the treasure within
 - It took about 5 seconds for us to realize that this was an outside toy
 - Because as soon as he began hammering and chiseling away, tiny blue sand particles went flying all over our kitchen!
 - It was clear to us that by the time he reached his gemstone, we would be cleaning sand out of our house for months
 - Fortunately we were in a warmer season and the weather was pretty, so I lit the grill and we all went outside on the patio while Gaius worked
 - He worked hard, he worked diligently, he hammered, he sawed, he brushed away the sand, he even figured out how to drill a hole in it
 - Then he went and got some of my tools- larger hammer and other tools to help break into the rock
 - Finally, this tiny gemstone no bigger than the tip of your thumb began to be seen
 - And after some more work, freshly energized by finally seeing it, he freed it from the man-made sandstone
 - We never could figure out what type of gemstone... maybe low quality Amethyst?
 - But of course it was not too much longer that it did not matter anymore
 - But the journey, the reward for patient diligence, the uncovering of the mystery gemstone was worth the small amount of money he paid
 - And I got to thinking about that thing today, and wondering if you and I are not a little bit like that toy

- If our true identity is not sometimes hidden beneath some sand, some clay
- And if you and I don't also need to be uncovered and revealed
- To reveal the image of God built right in to the very fabric of who we are, to see ourselves and others as very children of God
- The good news is that the Baptismal waters are much more gentle and efficient than the little hammer and saw
- And we can return over and over to those waters to be reminded of our Baptism, and who we really are underneath everything else
- Who we really are
- Today [at 10am] we get the privilege, and I mean it because it really is, the privilege of baptizing NellaRose Torbeck into the family of God
 - Baptism is that moment when we are marked as God's own forever with what the prayer book calls an indelible mark
 - When the adoption into God's family is made plain for all to see
 - It transforms us and starts us on our intentional spiritual path
 - I also believe that an equally helpful way of looking at Baptism is that it uncovers and reveals what is already true
 - It washes away everything else that gets added on, and proclaims what has always been true
 - That this person, regardless of age, is already made in God's image
 - Is already loved and known and called
 - And now, washing away all of the other things that hid it, we can see the truth, be reminded of the divine truth
 - That this person, and indeed every person, has been made in God's image, is a precious loved child of God
 - And now that we all know that, and we know that God loves us and walks with us, and knows us by name
 - There is a chance for us to respond and join in relationship and in convenient with God who has plans for us
 - And wants us to grow into the full stature of Christ, that is to fully realize our created purpose
 - To grow into our name, so to speak, that is already there, that God already knows
- Our reading this morning from Isaiah talks to this very point, even though the author is not really talking about Baptism per se
 - He is giving his spiritual autobiography
 - And he writes what has over my life become one of the more meaningful passages of scripture

- He says that the Lord named him even before he was born, named him in the womb
- Then later he again says God formed him in the womb to be God's servant
- God had created Isaiah to be a prophet, named him, gave him a purpose from the very beginning¹
- And Isaiah would prophesy so Israel might return to God, for Israel to be a light to the nations,
- And to remind Israel that God is faithful and has chosen them
- There's a little saying about prophets: prophets do not predict the future like fortune tellers
- Instead prophets speak the truth, reveal what is hidden, and then warn of the consequences that may come depending upon the choices made
- They reveal the truth by brushing away the false narratives that cover it up
- Richard Rohr says that prophets "evoke a crisis where one did not appear to exist before their truth-telling"²
- But the truth that the prophet tells is that the crisis was already there, underneath the agreed upon lies, covered up
- Prophets speak the truth to uncover what is really happening
- Isaiah is reminding Israel of who they really are, underneath, at their core
- And when Jesus was baptized, as we hear now from John's gospel where last week we were in Matthew
 - John's gospel tells us about the baptism from John's perspective and retelling
 - John points to Jesus twice in today's reading, proclaiming him to be the one who ranks ahead of John
 - And again, that Jesus is the Lamb of God
 - And John recounts when he baptized Jesus, how he saw the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven
 - And it remained on him
 - Jesus' baptism pulled back the veil and showed us something, revealed Jesus' true identity and purpose
 - And John could not help but tell everyone about it afterward
 - Jesus then immediately goes on to do the same for others

¹ Feasting #1 244

² <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/disrupting-the-status-quo-2023-01-15/>

- And he calls disciples, and then gives one a new name, or perhaps reveals his true name
- Simon, son of John, you are to be called Cephas, which is translated Peter.
- The Rock on which the church will be built.
- That is who you really are underneath it all, not just a fisherman, but Peter
- We also call out a person's name when they are baptized
- In our culture, it is already their given name, however in other cultures and times people were given a Baptismal name
- Like Simon, given a name to reflect their real identity as children of God
- Today we will name NellaRose as God's own forever, again only stating what God already has made to be true
- But now, in our midst, in front of us all, it cannot be denied or hidden
- When we baptize a little one like we are today, it is about that new born person's life in Christ and bringing them into the family of God
 - We are marking the beginning of their life following Jesus
 - We are revealing their true nature as created in God's image
 - And... especially when we baptize someone young, we are taking on for ourselves a lot of responsibility
 - An infant cannot make any decisions for themselves at this point, so today becomes a lot about the promises the parents make
 - Setting this child on a path that they believe to be holy, live giving, and one that brings them closer to God in their life
 - It's a big promise we as parents make!
 - And while it is only a very short two words, we as a church are making a big promise as well
 - We will say, loudly and with courage, "We will!"
 - We who witness these vows that the parents are making also make a vow, that we will support this person in their life in Christ.
 - WE WILL
 - So much is packed into those two little words
 - And at the heart of that promise is that we will always see and remember and remind everyone that this person is a precious child of God
 - That as this person grows up, we will remind them that they are loved by God, by their parents, and by us.
 - And that God has been working on them from the very beginning, longing for a relationship with them
 - Wanting them to love others as God has loved them.

- And helping the parents make sure that nothing ends up covering up and hiding that truth.
- It is our job, church, to make sure we help them keep the gemstone visible, the truth of God within us
- And then, following the baptism, I will come down the aisle and sprinkle water on you
 - And tell you to remember your baptism
 - This is a moment that allows us to remember our own walk with God, and maybe to ask ourselves once again, “Who am I?”
 - Really, beneath the masks, the artificial selves, the expectations we and others put on us
 - Beneath the choices, circumstances, even the mistakes made
 - Who are we?
 - And who did God create us to be, and who is God calling us to be?
 - Rowan Williams says, “We cannot be understood apart from Jesus” since we received our name and identity in Baptism ³
 - That is who we really are, because of whose we really are- who we belong to
 - And God is calling you and me and NellaRose and this church by name to be God’s presence to each other
 - And to the world
 - May the waters of baptism wash away the everything but who God as created us to be
 - And uncover who we really are.

Amen.

³ Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 55, quoted by Greg Garrett in *Feasting on the Word Year A Epiphany 2, Homiletical Perspective*