

Christy Benson: Peter Benson's Baptism Sermon

Sermon for Seekers Church

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Good Morning,

It is fitting it is that today's reading from Romans is a passage that Rob picked out for [his ordination](#), conducted by Marjory Bankson. Today, it pops up as the reading for Peter's baptism, which Peter Bankson will perform.

Well, in Lutheran tradition, it seems that every good sermon can somehow link the text to either baptism or communion. Today is Peter's baptism, and I hope you will indulge me as I share some of the thoughts I have been having about baptism in general and specifically that of my son.

When Peter was being born, our very jovial doctor yelled out, as words of encouragement, "**go to the light.**" Rob and I started laughing and were explaining (during labor, mind you) that Rob was a hospice chaplain and that phrase "go to the light" has a whole other meaning in Rob's line of work. The doctor was very quick to shy away from the death connection at the time, but in many ways, it is an appropriate connection.

In Rob and Marjory's class on death and dying (I received the Cliff Notes version) they sought to help people reflect back on some of the miniature deaths and resurrections they have experienced during their lives which help them prepare for ultimate death and resurrection.

At Peter's birth, he experienced his first miniature death and resurrection. The life he had known for the past 9 months – a comfortable, warm, watery life where all his needs were immediately met – was taken from him. Instead, he was now in a much harder environment. Food has to be asked for, waste removed, oxygen taken in, carbon dioxide removed. Life became much harder. But also so much more exciting...there are things to see, taste, feel, talk about...When Peter was first born, he sat in my arms, opening and closing his eyes slowly, trying to take in this new experience and this whole new world around him. It was indeed a death and resurrection to a new way of being.

Today, Peter will experience another miniature death and resurrection. In his baptism, Peter's former life is ending and he is being born into a new life as part of a Christian community. As with Peter's birth, he will be leaving a potentially very comfortable life and entering a much harder, though much more exciting life. As part of the Christian community, Peter will have a call and an obligation to the people of God. As a follower of Jesus, Peter will be called on to show God's love and God's grace through whatever path he chooses to take in life. Perhaps that call will lead him to choose some very difficult paths. However, these are also enriching, rewarding paths. I know that as I have heard stories of call, those two elements are always present – the challenge, the difficulty, and the exciting, rewarding opportunity. (Certainly, I heard Peter Bankson talking about those themes after his Guatemala trip.)

Also as with Peter's physical birth, this new birth is happening before Peter is in a position to choose it himself. He cannot weigh the options and decide if this is what he really wants in life. He cannot decide to "accept Jesus Christ as his Personal Lord and Savior." Instead, God has decided to take Peter, whether Peter accepts it or not.

To me, this is the most powerful and deeply meaningful part of

infant baptism. It brings me to tears whenever I think about it. You see, in his baptism, Peter is not choosing God. He is not capable of choosing God. I do not think I am even capable of choosing God and knowing what that will mean for my life. (Certainly, growing up in Milwaukee, having hardly ever been on a boat, how could I have predicted I would be spending a great deal of time on boats with Lobstermen in Maine?) Instead, God is reaching out and choosing Peter. God is claiming Peter for his kingdom. God is saying I love you, I want you in my community and you really do not have a choice in the matter. Peter is not accepting Christ, Christ is accepting him. Despite any future faults he might have, God has chosen to love Peter and ...

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor the terrible twos, nor junior high, nor acne, nor a first broken heart, nor skipping church, nor teenage rebellion, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate Peter from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Peter is stuck with God no matter what he does.

This is indeed Amazing Grace.

I have been reading "the Runaway Bunny" lately, and it would be a good alternate reading for this understanding of God's grace and love. In it, the baby bunny decides he wants to run away, but his mother tells him that if he runs away, she will run after him "for he is **her** little bunny." If he becomes a flower, she will become the gardener, if he becomes a rock on a mountain, she will become a mountain climber, if he becomes a boat, she will become the wind and blow him where she wants him to go. The story ends with the little bunny saying "Shucks. I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny." And so he did. "Have a carrot," said the mother bunny.

God has chosen Peter, whether he always likes it or not. Peter

now belongs to God and he might as well stay in God's loving arms and be His little Peter.

Peter's middle name is Samuel largely because we love that story of God's call in the night, and Samuel's initial confusion but ultimate enthusiasm and readiness. Here I am Lord! God will be calling on our Peter Samuel to take on the difficult and exciting work of ushering in God's kingdom – Seeking justice for the oppressed, loving those who feel unlovable, lifting up what is vulnerable in our world.

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed... The Kingdom of God is like yeast (who here is thinking about [Peter Bankson's sermon](#) on bread baking and the smell of yeast that permeated this room?) The beautiful thing about parables and similes is that we can come up with an infinite number of fitting comparisons. (Anyone who has spent time talking to Peter B the First will be aware of this limitless supply of creative analogies.) In one of the classes for the school of Christian living, we were asked to draw a picture of the kingdom of God. I drew a picture of the lighthouse on Isle au Haut – the island where Rob and I spent our honeymoon, and one of the islands where Rob will be pastor and Peter will grow up. (The picture on the altar is a shot I took of the Lighthouse from the road. At the end of a long day on the hiking and biking trails, we would round a corner and see this wonderful view.) The kingdom of God is like a small island – you are known, your actions and words will affect the people and environment around you, and you are dependent on the larger community to survive. In other words, the kingdom of God is here and now, and Peter's job, and all of our jobs, is to live out this kingdom with our lives.

Therefore, on this occasion of a death and resurrection in Peter's life, in preparation for his ultimate death and resurrection:

Peter –

Know that God will always love you, no matter what.

Go to the light.

In the words of the Lutheran liturgy for baptism, "may your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven."

Amen