

The Great Vigil of Easter
St. Timothy's Episcopal Church / Diocese of Missouri
Creve Coeur, Missouri
The Rev. Paul A. Metzler, D.Min., Associate Priest

March 31, 2018

Dear Nicholas and Desirae -

I'm writing my sermon in the form of a letter to the two of you. I will get a copy to each of you. It's not that my sermon is that great, but because your baptism is that important.

- It's my hope you'll keep this letter safely tucked away and read it from time to time over the years to help you think back to your baptism.
- In fact, you might read it next March 31st, the first anniversary of your baptism.
- Treat your baptism like a second birthday, which of course it is.

Baptism is a new birth into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So tell your mother, your grandparents, cousins, aunts & uncles to remember your baptism every March 31st. Have a cake and a present or two just like you get on your birthday.

That applies not just to Nicholas and Desirae, but to all of you present this evening. It'd be a wonderful thing if our baptism anniversary was on our personal and family calendars just like our birthday.

- Put it on your Facebook Timeline. That would get some attention!

I was baptized on February 18, 1945 - I was three months old. Obviously, I don't have a conscious memory of it like you two will have of your baptism this evening. But that's okay, because baptism doesn't work because we are aware of it.

That's the first thing I want you, Nicholas and Desirae, to remember:

- **Baptism works because God through the Holy Spirit marks us in our baptism as Christ's own forever.**

Even if you forget your baptism from time to time, God remembers & loves.

- God loves you, Nicolas.
- God loves you, Desirae.

Forever.

As a young adult I learned that my baptism took place on my grandparent's 34th wedding anniversary. These were my mother's parents who'd emigrated from Germany to the USA as a young couple with their first baby, my Aunt Meta, on the ship with them. They went on to have three more children, my mother one of them. They were there at my baptism, just like your grandparents are here tonight.

The reason I'm telling you this story of my baptism is to make my second point:

- **Baptism is never an individual thing. It is always communal.**

Everyone around you tonight has stories, too, and you will have stories. All of them are joined in this font and at the altar. The gift of our baptism is that it transforms our individual life into a life together.

You will always be fondly associated to St. Timothy's parish. You're been in confirmation classes with David and other kids here the last few months. We hope you'll find a spiritual home at St. Timothy's for many years to come.

But you may be surprised to hear that your baptism also links you to the baptized all over the world, both near and far. Those in downtown St. Louis, over in Kansas City, up in Chicago, Los Angeles, wherever. It includes our sisters and brothers further away - in the Diocese of South Sudan (East-Central Africa), for instance, with whom our Diocese of Missouri has a special companion relationship.

- **Baptism is never an individual thing. It is always shared.**

Community can far in **time** – here I am thinking years, even centuries. The gift of your baptism links to you those who lived in faithfulness to God's love well before your own time. We already heard several scriptures stories of God's dream from the beginning of time that we would live in God's love, grace and redemption.

- If I had more time, I'd introduce you to "Uncle Amos - that would be the prophet Amos. He lived 7-centuries before Jesus & called people to genuine faithfulness just like Jesus would do.
 - Don't let religious ceremony distract you from what it is supposed to lead to: "*But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:-24)*
- If I had time, I'd introduce you to "Uncle Peter" – that would be St. Peter, the great Apostle of Jesus. He had a bumpy ride as a follower of Jesus. He even at one time denied he was a disciple
 - But ultimately he said: "*Lord, you know that I love you.*"
- Or to "Aunt Monnica" – she was the beloved mother of St. Augustine, the great Bishop in North Africa in the fourth century. She's honored because she prayed so much for her son that he became baptized and a great Christian leader.

I could go on, of course. But I wanted to give you this brief taste of the rich community that is now yours.

Nicholas & Desirae, please remember:

- **Your baptism creates life and connections across time and space.**

It saves you from isolation, which is life-deadening. So, welcome into the mystical but real community of Jesus Christ, past, present and future.

Last week I asked your grandparents what they thought I should say in my sermon. They said, "*Listen to your grandparents.*" That was clever, but I think also wise.

Because widening it out, it isn't just about obedience. They meant listen, so you can grow in wisdom.

- **Listen, so you can hear the voice of Jesus in your baptism as you commit to a life in God's love, justice and mercy.**

Listen, so you'll discover where that commitment will lead.

Another great Christian leader of the recent past, Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way."

Nicholas & Desirae:

- On the one hand, baptism is a simple thing – some water and words.
- But they are God's word of love calling you into a future of great and small things in the name of Jesus Christ.

Welcome and God bless you both.

Out-takes:

No Christian does anything on their own. We live through the witness of the saints; preachers of the past inspire us and judge us. Scripture itself is a product of the community of faith. A host of now-forgotten teachers taught us how to speak. Nobody is born a preacher.

If you moments all of us as a community and the two of you as individuals will hear the great words of the baptismal liturgy we have. We have already heard great words this evening great words of G great words of scripture. For lessons we have read a part of our salvation history they at the store they are the story from different times in different perspectives of God creating sustaining and redeeming this world. This salvation story is now has always been your story but tonight because of your baptism it will be more profoundly your story. Because your baptism is entry into the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Graham Nash: *Make sure the things you do keep us alive.*

No Christian does anything on their own. We live through the witness of the saints; preachers of the past inspire us and judge us. Scripture itself is a product of the community of faith. A host of now-forgotten teachers taught us how to speak. Nobody is born a preacher.

Anna Quindlen May 17, 2017 WU Commencement

None of you want to have that sort of life, so you can't let fear rule you. For your own sake and for the sake of this great nation, fear is what has poisoned our culture, our community and our character. The very worst things in this country are done out of fear. Homophobia, sexism, racism, religious bigotry, xenophobia, the embrace of demagogues, they all arise out of fear of that which is unknown or different.

We heard in genesis of God's creation of the world. Not a scientific creation story but a story out of deep understanding of the nature of the world and the car on to mitt dependence ultimate dependence upon the God who created us each in our own way.

We heard earlier in the broad sweep of readings from the Old Testament about these dreams and purposes. From the story of creation, to the brokenness at the time of the flood, to God's rescue of Israel at the Red Sea, to the new heart and spirit, to the dry bones come back to life...all of these reminding us of God's loving purpose time and again over the centuries. And finally in the Gospel proclaimed from Luke, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

This *Great Vigil of Easter* liturgy is of course, one of the most ancient and traditional times in which catechumens who had prepared through out the preceding 40-days of Lent would be baptized. And, so, Simon you have joined tonight not only with Christ, which is of course of central importance, but you have joined with a staggering number of millions upon millions of brothers and sisters in Christ, who over the centuries have sacramentally died with Christ in the waters of baptism at the *Great Vigil*.