

Sermon for Proper 14

RCL Lectionary, Year C

[Genesis 15:1-6](#) / [Psalm 33:12-22](#) / [Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16](#) / [Luke 12:32-40](#)

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

August 8th, 2010

The Episcopal Church of Our Saviour

Mill Valley, California

In God's Good Pleasure

I had lunch this week with an old friend, one whom I had not seen in a year. He and his wife used to come and pray with me once a week when I was serving a congregation in San Francisco. We would not only crack open the books of Scripture for discussion, but open the books of our lives and reflect on where God was moving, was at work in the midst of our busy lives. What struck me was the way my friend stopped at one point in our conversation and burst into a great smile. Now in his late sixties or early seventies (I cannot be sure – he's one of those timeless people who never seem to change!) he reflected on his long devotion to being at prayer with God's people and how it has remade him over time. So familiar he is now with the psalms he has prayed all these years, he quoted to me with ease one beautiful passage from Psalm 122:

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

He volunteered this verse with such indescribable joy – a joy that captures in some incredible way the feeling Abram must have experienced when God took him outside the tent, showed him the sky, and made him the greatest promise an ancient Bedouin could imagine: an inheritance. . . heirs as numerous as the stars . . . the beginning of a new kingdom. It is the same joy that Jesus reflects to us in today's Gospel, when he promises a people weary with the corruption of both religious and imperial authorities and their short, mean lives that theirs is an inheritance, a kingdom, given to them by their loving God that will outlast all corruption and abuses.

It is a joy captured in our Psalm this day:

Our soul waits for the lord;

he is our help and shield.

Our heart is glad in him,

because we trust in his holy name.

Let your steadfast love, O lord,

be upon us, even as we hope in you.

William and Shelby's parents and families are about to offer their children up today in the most ancient of Christian traditions. Baptism is not simply engaging in a ritual, nor is it merely stepping through the motions of a carefully crafted series of words and actions made to be beautiful. Baptism is about offering – sacrifice, actually. Jesus commends us in today's Gospel to sell our possessions and give alms.

It is one thing to think about that in financial terms. It is quite another to relinquish control and a sense of ownership over our children – to offer even them to our God.

The language of baptism is about death and resurrection, the central action of our life of faith in Christ Jesus – the central action *by* our Savior who offered anything and everything up on the cross. If adults are being baptized, they engage in a similar self-offering. With infants, they are offered up by their families and parents. If this thought makes you at all uncomfortable, it should. Sacrifice of children to the gods is a terrifying piece of human history and even pre-history. Among the more famous passages of Genesis involves Abraham offering up his son Isaac, the embodiment of God's promise to him, on an altar.

The key difference is that ours is not a God who desires blood sacrifice, but rather a living offering. If you think about that for very long, I think you will find this kind of offering is far more profound than the blood libations of old. A living sacrifice is dynamic and powerful. Self-offering is about giving over every breath, every action, even every thought and feeling to our God for our remaking. And so I am fond of reminding parents, as I reminded Shelby's and William's, that the child they get back after baptism is not the child they brought to church this morning. They get back a Christian, a child who is "marked as Christ's own forever." Legally, perhaps, they remain their son and daughter. Spiritually and eternally, though, they will be a daughter and son of God. Parents are no longer owners. They are only stewards and temporary caretakers of this new life in Christ – something that is both a bit unnerving and also surprisingly liberating.

Shelby and William are about to be taking their first footsteps (yes, even baby steps!) into the great kingdom we are all living into. One that binds us together as a people, a new kingdom, that we may grow towards our loving, everlasting God. Their inheritance, too, is promised to be as abundant as the stars in the sky. Their discipleship is promised over time to lead them towards greater life, so that perhaps they one day, too, will joyously quote psalms as they reflect on the abundant life they have received. This is what a living sacrifice means as God writes the Word upon our very hearts and weaves it into the very fabric of our lives.

Jesus says, "Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Shelby and William and we are blessed by a God who loves us better than we love him, and this is good news for us, and for a world desperately in need of that kind of love that takes us and remakes us for greater life.