

TODAY IS A SPECIAL DAY. IT IS THE LORD'S DAY, THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH, THE TIME WHEN WE GATHER TOGETHER TO WORSHIP AND GLORIFY GOD. THAT ALONE MAKES THIS DAY VERY SPECIAL. BUT TODAY WE ARE ALSO CELEBRATING – CELEBRATING THE 100 YEARS THIS FONT HAS STOOD HERE, AND ALL THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE PASSED THROUGH ITS WATERS, AND THE PEOPLE AND FAMILIES THAT HAVE GATHERED AROUND IT FOR BAPTISM, FOR CHILDREN'S TIME, AS THEY WALKED BY TO RECEIVE COMMUNION – WE ARE CELEBRATING MUCH, MUCH MORE THAN JUST THIS BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF FUNCTIONAL ART. WE ARE REJOICING IN OUR HERITAGE AND HOPING FOR OUR FUTURE. WE DO NOT GATHER THIS DAY ONLY TO REMEMBER THE SAINTS OF THIS CHURCH – THOSE FAITHFUL WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US – WE ARE ALSO BAPTIZING THOSE WHO ARE THE HOPE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY.

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE TELLS THE STORY OF JESUS' BAPTISM IN SHORT ORDER, INCLUDING THE DESCENDING DOVE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, GOD SAYS "THIS IS MY SON, MY BELOVED, WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED," JUST LIKE WE'VE HEARD IT BEFORE. BUT IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, WE SEEM TO RUSH THROUGH THAT ACCOUNTING TO GET TO JESUS' ANCESTRY. NOW THIS IS DONE A BIT TONGUE IN CHEEK, BECAUSE THE ANCESTRY IS TOLD FROM THE MALE ANCESTORS, NOT THE FEMALE, AND EVEN THE WRITER OF LUKE KNOWS THAT JESUS IS NOT REALLY A BLOOD RELATIVE OF JOSEPH. AND SO THE WRITER LUKE GOES ON AND ON AND ON THROUGH AGES AND AGES OF NAMES UNTIL WE GET BACK TO ADAM, THE FIRST HUMAN. WOW. THAT'S QUITE A LINEAGE. BUT AS I WAS READING THIS SCRIPTURE, I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHY – WHY WOULD THE WRITER OF LUKE NEARLY SKIM OVER JESUS' BAPTISM – A PRETTY BIG EVENT – TO INCLUDE ALL THESE NAMES OF PEOPLE TO WHOM JESUS IS NOT *really* RELATED? AFTER ALL, SHOULDN'T WE BE FOCUSING ON THE FACT THAT GOD JUST CLAIMED HIM AS GOD'S ONLY SON? SEEMS LIKE THAT'D BE A BIGGER

LINEAGE TO POINT OUT THAN ALL THOSE REGULAR HUMAN FOLKS, MOST OF WHOM AREN'T EVEN ALIVE ANYMORE.

BUT IN THE TIME LEADING UP TO TODAY'S WORSHIP, AS SANDI LEE AND MARY FRANCES ABBOTT HELPED GATHER ALL THE NAMES OF THOSE BAPTIZED HERE AND WE BEGAN TO MAKE A LIST THAT PUTS LUKE'S GENEALOGY TO SHAME, I COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL THERE'S A POINT TO ALL THIS NAME GATHERING AND LIST-READING. THOSE LISTS, THE ONE IN LUKE AND THE ONE WE ROLLED OUT TODAY, THAT'S OUR FAMILY. NO, YOU'RE RIGHT, NOT FAMILY WE ARE RELATED TO IN A BIOLOGICAL WAY – BUT FAMILY WE ARE RELATED TO BY ADOPTION. GOD CLAIMS EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US AS CHILDREN OF GOD – BEFORE WE EVEN COME TO THIS FONT. GOD CLAIMS US AS HEIRS *with* CHRIST, CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT. WE ARE ALL A PART OF GOD'S FAMILY. AND THAT MEANS MORE THAN JUST BECAUSE WE WERE BAPTIZED HERE, THOUGH THAT IS A WONDERFUL SACRAMENT THAT DEMONSTRATES GOD'S GRACE. JESUS' GENEALOGY HAD PEOPLE WHO HAD SHAPED JOSEPH'S LIFE TO LEAD HIM TO BE THE MAN HE WAS AND TO MAKE THE CHOICES HE DID. FAMILY IS ABOUT LIVING, WORSHIPING AND LEARNING TOGETHER. I LOOK AT THAT HUGE LIST AND I SEE THE NAMES OF PEOPLE SITTING HERE TODAY IN THIS CONGREGATION; I SEE THE NAMES OF CHILDREN OF THIS CONGREGATION WHO ARE SCATTERED FAR ACROSS THE COUNTRY, I SEE THE NAMES OF CHURCH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND ELDERS, OF GENEROUS BENEFACTORS AND GENERATIONS OF FAMILIES, AND I SEE NEW NAMES, NAMES OF FOLKS WHO JOINED THIS CHURCH WHEN IT WASN'T EASY TO COME DOWNTOWN, PEOPLE WHO BAPTIZED THEIR CHILDREN HERE BECAUSE SOMEHOW, IN THE MIDST OF A CITY THAT SEEMED TO BE DYING THEY SAW HOPE HERE IN THIS PLACE – THEY EXPERIENCED THIS LOVING AND WELCOMING CONGREGATION AND BECAME A PART OF THIS FAMILY – A FAMILY IN WHICH THEY *wanted* TO RAISE THEIR CHILDREN. I SEE AN INCREDIBLE, AMAZING CLOUD OF WITNESSES.

THESE SAINTS OF OUR PAST HELPED SHAPE WHO WE ARE TODAY, WHERE WE ARE TODAY AND GIVE US A HERITAGE TO LIVE INTO AS WE CONTINUE TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS FROM THIS CORNER OF BIRMINGHAM. THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS REMINDS US THAT WE ARE ALL A PART OF THE INHERITANCE OF GOD – THAT IS WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF GOD – WE ARE ALL LOVED AND CHERISHED BY GOD, NO MATTER OUR AGE OR OUR BACKGROUND, NO MATTER IF WE ARE THE THIRD GENERATION IN THIS CHURCH OR IF WE WALKED THROUGH THOSE DOORS FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS MORNING – YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD. AND IN THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS WE FIND A PRAYER FOR US ALL –

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power (Ephesians 1: 17-19a)

SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW WHAT IS THE HOPE TO WHICH CHRIST HAS CALLED YOU. THESE MANY GENERATIONS PAST HAD HOPE AND A CALLING – THEY PLANTED THEMSELVES WITH DEEP ROOTS ON THIS CORNER, AND REMAINED HERE THROUGH TWO WORLD WARS, OTHER CONFLICTS, THE DIFFICULT TIME OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, WERE STILL HERE WHEN IT SEEMED THAT DOWNTOWN WAS ONLY FOR THE HOMELESS – AND WE'RE STILL HERE TODAY. WHEN WE GATHER AT THIS TABLE TODAY, WE GATHER WITH ALL THE SAINTS, REMEMBERING THAT ONE DAY WE SHALL FEAST WITH THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US. WHAT HOPE DO WE BRING TO THIS TABLE? WHAT HOPE DO WE BRING TO THIS FONT TODAY AS WE BAPTIZE THESE SIX CHILDREN AND YOUTH? WHAT IS OUR NEXT CALLING AS CHILDREN OF GOD?

MAY GOD INDEED GIVE EACH OF US A SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION,
SO THAT WE MAY KNOW CHRIST, AND WITH THE EYES OF OUR HEART
ENLIGHTENED, WE MAY KNOW WHAT IS THE HOPE TO WHICH WE ARE
CALLED. AMEN