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Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces
Baptism and Father's Day Sunday
June 17, 2018
Mark 4:26-34

Mustard Seed Faith

to all the dads present with us today.

We have four people to be baptized on this extra special Father's Day Sunday: 1 young adult (Lydia) and 3 children Emilee, Sarah, Aidan --

I was recently reminded by an older pastor:

"Whenever you feel unloved, unimportant or insecure, remember to whom you belong."

I don't know if that ever happens to any of you, that you feel:

"...unloved, unimportant or insecure,"

But if so... remember to whom you belong --

We belong to a God who uses the word Father, Good Father, Heavenly Father to describe the love he holds for us.

Now earthly Fatherhood is a special calling... even the animal kingdom, which God created - has some examples of good fatherhood throughout the earth:

The golden jackal works in partnership with the mom of his pups to hunt and provide for their little ones... plus the jackel dad knows how to keep grocery bills down — the jackel dad feeds his kids with regurgitated food. Hm. Some say that may be taking the "hand me down" concept a little too far.

The giant waterbug of Japan is another great dad... Mom cements her eggs to Daddy waterbug's back; he carries the eggs around for a week until they hatch, when he finds himself giving piggyback rides to up to 150 kids!

And you probably all remember learning about the champion dad of the animal world...

The male seahorse is actually the one who gets pregnant, carrying up to 1,000 babies at a time in his little daddy seahorse pouch.

Human dads, you have it easy!

As impressive as all of this is -

I did a little research and I can't find a single animal, where caring for offspring extends to the offspring's adulthood. Maybe, among elephants, the *mom* elephants seem to know their daughters, but in the animal kingdom, *most* fathers *never* care for their offspring... and not a single animal dad of any kind cares about his kids once either he or they have left the nest.

But when God created people - male and female - *equally* created in God's image -- God chose to build in us humans, bonds of love that extend way beyond childhood... bonds of love that are meant to be lifelong.

We're the only animal that does this... that is part of why the Bible says we humans are the crown of creation. And God chose the role of Fatherhood, specifically to use as a picture word of his love for us. However good or not so good our earthly human fathers have been -- and it's always a mixture - there are no perfect human parents -- God has chosen gladly to be our perfect, heavenly, eternal Father.

"Whenever you feel unloved, unimportant or insecure, remember to whom you belong."

The four people baptized today who will receive a "bath" and a new birth all in one mysterious moment - their old selves will die with Christ, they will rise with Christ, and get to claim God as their Forever Father.

Now allow me to do a little teaching about Christian baptism:

Some of you may think there is a “Catholic” baptism and a “Protestant” baptism. But in the Bible there’s no such thing as Catholic and Protestant, there’s only one baptism - so if it’s done with water, and in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and if there is faith present -- even a teeny tiny bit of faith the size of a mustard seed -- we Lutherans and Catholics and most Protestants happily accept and recognize each other’s baptisms.

Some of you may think oh, well, there’s the adult baptism and infant baptism. But, the Bible never talks about a difference between baptizing adults and baptizing children or babies. In fact, there are at least five times in the New Testament, where whole households are baptized together

And in those days, the households were big, multi-generational families and live-in servants and slaves and their children, and those households definitely would have included even little babies.

--Getting baptized is *not* like getting on the ride at Disneyland – there is not a minimum age or height qualification.

The only Disneyland I’ve ever been to was in Hong Kong – once I was in line for a roller coaster ride with Wayne – we love roller coaster rides –

and I looked to my left and I looked to my right and everybody was much, much younger than us. Also they kept putting announcements on the speaker system: *this ride is not meant for people with asthma, heart conditions, high blood pressure...* I don’t think I have any of those things, but I started getting a little worried when I heard the announcements over and over again....

Because I love Disneyland and rollercoaster rides, let me say that getting baptized is a little bit like getting a free ticket -- not to the Disney magic make-believe kingdom -- but into God’s mysterious, often invisible, but absolutely *real*/kingdom.

Getting baptized is a little like climbing aboard on God’s adventure ride, but there are no minimum height requirements, and no maximum age limits, there is one Baptism for any age, and any age is the right age for Baptism.

...

Ok so how about sprinkling vs. dunking...

Some people think there is a right and a wrong way to do baptism.

But no, the Bible - read in context – not just picking things out here and there like certain politicians have been doing this week [I tell you always be skeptical when politicians start quoting scripture for their own purposes –]

But God’s word is not legalistic & never makes a big deal about how much water is used in baptism. Sure, Jesus was baptized in a river, but the first Christian baptism of 3,000 people in Acts 2 wouldn’t have had enough water to immerse so many people - The river Jordan does NOT run through Jerusalem. So that first baptism was almost surely done by sprinkling or splashing -- the Bible doesn’t go into the exact details, which goes to show God is not a micromanager when it comes to HOW to do a baptism.

We Lutherans, being practical, usually use a bowl of water,

however Martin Luther in the 1500’s said it would be his *preference* to do baptism by complete immersion... since it gives a great picture of the complete washing of sin, and a new clean child of God is born anew.

So because of the Bible and Martin Luther’s teaching we your pastors, use a lot of water for baptism. We can’t immerse you into this font, but let me warn you, in case no one has mentioned it yet, that when you are baptized, you *will* get wet,

Water is the material element of the baptism, which you can see and feel and hear... and then there’s faith – which you might only have a teeny tiny bit of – faith the size of a mustard seed, other people might not even be able to see your faith... and there’s the Spirit, which is also sometimes called the “shy member” of the Holy Trinity, usually the Spirit is mysterious and invisible except for her impact on our lives.

[Yes, I did say her, I can’t resist, in the Hebrew language the word for Spirit is *ruach*, a nice feminine word]

So why, again, do we NEED Holy Baptism?

We are sinful. Everyone of us. Sins like - how you treated your sister - how you failed as a father... Sins like the hungry and uneducated and fatherless in the world we have conveniently ignored *because we are busy people...*

sins like the failure to love others like you love yourself, which tells us that failure to love ourselves is a sin, too.

And then when we see new Christians come to the baptismal font in repentance and just a little bit of faith...

We can be renewed in our own faith.

These 4 people today, aren't *only* going to be washed with water, they will be raised up to flourish—maybe like a mighty tree – maybe like an unruly shrub – in either case, they will have the power of Jesus and His Holy Spirit, reaching out to provide shelter and shade for others. Because Jesus says, that's what happens when you become part of the kingdom of God.

You become the Heavenly Father's own child. Loved forever. Growing stronger branches for offering love to others.

So dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

"Whenever you feel unloved, unimportant or insecure, (or tempted... or unclean... or like a failure... or misunderstood... or of no use) oh, remember to whom you belong."

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, remember it. Amen.