

The Rev. Patricia Rose
All Saints' Sunday
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
November 3, 2024

Friends, we're about to baptize 9 adorable little ones, ages 6 weeks old to 4 years old.

Does anybody else other than me cry when you see a baby get baptized?

Something wells up at the sight of babies gamely getting water poured on their heads as loved ones surround them.

Baptism is also an ancient rite of Christian initiation woven through with over 2,000 years of reflection, history, metaphor, meaning, and symbolism, and it also points us to something more universal, something deep and primal for humanity.

It's the marking of, the blessing of, a soul embarking on its odyssey through a human life. And in particular the *stunning opportunity* that a human life offers to experience the higher Truth of things, of who we are and what we're a part of.

To not only experience that Truth, but to be strengthened and guided by it, to engage with it, to feel the joy and freedom of it.

In our psalm today we heard: *The earth is God's and all that's in it, and all who live here, for God created the earth on the seas and rivers.*

In other words, this is a place which divine love has fashioned, founded on the flow of something life-giving, the waters.

The psalm continues, asking "Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? and stand in God's holy place?" That is, who will experience the higher Truth of things, the precious gifts of Truth?

The answer comes: those who lift up their souls to the Truth, those who seek it.

That seeking is our choice, our opportunity.

The psalm tells us: Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O everlasting doors.

We are to open the doors of our minds, our hearts, our perspectives.

The task of living into the Truth is not easy, but it is the most important thing we need.

Even today as we gather to celebrate, we are each challenged by our individual pains and circumstances and by broader issues like the approaching election.

It's like no other election we've ever experienced, and we're walking in clouds of tension and fear. Across the country division and animosity are coiled like a tight spring. We can feel helpless in these days, or angry because we can't just fix things.

But, what we can do, the most important and most powerful thing we can do for ourselves, for our babies, for the world is, commit to getting grounded in the higher Truth of things, to do what we need to feel the presence of God, the grace that strengthens and guides and transforms us.

This is not just an empty theological idea. This Truth is flowing in the core of all humans, a vibrancy that we can touch and experience for ourselves, if we choose. It's simple, but not easy.

Baptism celebrates this undertaking, names both a way there, and all the help and encouragement that is available to us.

We celebrate Baptism on All Saints Day to remind us that we are supported by the grace of all souls who do this task, past and present. Each soul who touches the Truth and radiates it in the world has a powerful effect. And we cannot do this task alone. So we also stand by these babies in love and solidarity knowing the bittersweet Truth that they too will face challenges and pain, and they too will need strength and support. So we pledge our support.

We also renew our baptismal promises to practice ways of life that lift our souls to the Truth - to turn towards God, toward Truth, however we can, through love, through serving justice, through humbly coming to this table to nourish our souls,

We lift our souls through prayer - in silence, in attentive listening, in nature, in communion, in all honesty, in kindness, in being accountable for how we live.

And when it comes down to it, what we find in the core of Truth, in the heart of who we really are, and what we're part of is something more powerful than all human difficulties, even death, our greatest fear.

Today's gospel is a twisting tale of Jesus coming to help Lazarus later than hoped, of anger, confusion, weeping, and a preposterous miracle of resurrected life. The whole narrative is less about the details than the intimation that the Divine Truth is more powerful than our greatest fears and difficulties,

The highest Truth renders the wooden fortification of our fears to sawdust that blows away in the breath of True Life.

We may all live in a certain sort of death like Lazarus, asleep to the Reality we are living in. We are called from our tombs of unawareness by the voice of Christ.

Come out, Lazarus. Come out of your sleep to ascend the hill of the Lord, to awaken to the holy and liberating Truth of who you are and what you are part of.

The rite of Baptism developed over the ages to represent to the senses what is beyond the senses. This is very true in the case of water, a universal symbol of eternal life.

Clear and tasteless, water flows in the shape of whatever it's in. So plain, it's easy to overlook.

And yet there is no life without it. The truth is like this, and so is grace, so easily overlooked in our busy important thoughts, we miss it and its right here being given abundantly.

In life as in Baptism, the gifts of Spirit and Truth are freely given, but must be freely received by us, inhabited intentionally by us, through our free will choice to follow the ways of love revealed in the light of Christ.

At the end of the Baptism, all of the congregation will be asperged with water. That means the clergy are going to walk around throwing baptismal water at everybody.

Ok, not throwing it, just gently sprinkling it.

The tradition is to make the sign of the cross on yourself, to remember the life-giving gifts of Baptismal waters, of God's endless generosity and encouragement and love for us to know the truth and let it guide us, to participate in the evolution of humanity into a new Heaven and a new Earth.

I want to conclude with a story of a prayer that once came to me.

About 15 years ago, I was walking along the beautiful Youghiogheny River in western Maryland mountains after days of heavy storms. There had days of storms. The river was very full.

I remember standing on an outcropping of rock on the river and becoming riveted by the sight of some huge boulders across the river where enormous amounts of water were pouring through

The roar of it was so loud, you would need to raise your voice to have a conversation. The water was moving with such power and force that it appeared as a white blur in places. I could feel the soft mist of it even from where I was up on an overhanging rock.

I stooped down and gazed at the powerful charging water for a long time. I remember my mental focus softened and just the feeling of it washing over me viscerally, the energy, a sweet purity and beauty, the raw power.

and the softness of the mist. After a few minutes, a prayer came into my heart. There were words with it, but it was mostly the energetic feeling of lightness and joy and assurance. I wrote down the words later.

They were: *This much abundance. This much life. This much life force is streaming through you, now, in this moment, in all moments. Cleansing, giving, enlivening. This much creativity. This much grace. This much purification. This much encouragement from the Holy Spirit, saints, and guides. This much support.*

May the grace of today's baptisms and the grace of our babies illuminate our choices about lifting our Souls to the Truth and radiating in our lives, families and in this troubled world.