

I've been thinking about baptism all week. Today and two weeks from today are exciting days for Redeemer. This is the largest number of baptisms we've done since my first Easter here.

We tend to focus on the small one in arms, as most of our baptisms are for infants. We tend to focus on the baptism as an important moment in a person's life. It's easy to do. Babies are adorable and you never quite know what their reaction is going to be to the water. We get centered on the event itself and that this ritual bath isn't a one-off moment.

Baptism changes things.

Now, the sacrament of baptism doesn't change the fact that God loves all of God's people. That is a given. What baptism does change is our relationship with each other.

As you listen to parents and godparents presenting their children this morning, note that their last names – their family names – are omitted. Baptism doesn't begin our relationship with God; baptism begins our relationship with the Christian Community.

Baptism is a sacred trust between the baptized person, God, and the rest of the community. That sacred trust is what Jesus talked about with his disciples.

This gospel comes from the part of John's gospel called "The Farewell Discourse". We've gone back in time when Jesus is addressing his disciples at the Last Supper. He's foretold his betrayal and death. The disciples were told that love is evident when we are of service to each other. That doesn't make Jesus' declarations of betrayal and death easier to take. They don't want to be left behind or abandoned.

The fear of abandonment tugs at most everyone's heartstrings. It's usually seated in some event in childhood, the memory of which lies in the attic of our mind until circumstances call it back down to the living room. It could be as simple as not getting picked up at school on time or as complicated as losing a loved one to an accident or a disease. At our deepest level, we don't want to feel alone, unsupported, unloved.

I wonder. Did Lydia come to the place by the riverside because she was feeling alone? No man's name is associated with her. She is a professional business person – selling very expensive cloth to the exceedingly rich people of her town. Was there something she needed in her life that money couldn't buy?

Perhaps she was a widow who took over her husband's business at his death. At that time in history, finding other female entrepreneurs to network with would have been difficult, if not impossible. Was she seeking companionship as well as solace from a power bigger than herself? Bidden or unbidden, a relationship with God in Christ was what she ultimately found.

The key was that Lydia was open to hearing God's word. Upon hearing it, she was all in – not just becoming baptized, but becoming home base for Paul and his disciples as they spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Our baptismal candidates are taking the same first step as Lydia did. Three of them are choosing on their own to be baptized. The fourth will have promises made on his behalf but are no less open to the Holy Spirit's action that the others.

Jesus promises his followers that he won't leave them "orphaned" but will send them an Advocate – the Holy Spirit – who will be their constant companion. Today, we have a preview of Pentecost to come. We will bless water and say ancient words to initiate Tatum, Finn, Clara, and James into this imperfect, yet blessed, community we call Christianity.

We rejoice that in God we are never orphaned because we are blessed with the family that we see around us. We rejoice because our family just got bigger and better. We rejoice with the angels that today the names of these children are written in the Lamb's book of life. May we, with our prayers and actions, help them all to grow into the best that God has in store for them.

Amen.