

12 Pentecost A—August 3, 2008
Matthew 14:13-21
The Rev. David R. Wilt

This morning is Holy Baptism. It is an initiation rite. Literally, a “bringing into the family once and for all occasion.”

It’s handled differently in different denominations, but for us it is the offering of ourselves to God, or if it is a child, the parents and Godparents, undertaking a teaching role for the child that is offered to God, and the bestowing of the Holy Spirit upon that person. It is not a sacrifice but a sacrament. It is not a sacrifice but an offering.

Now that is not to say that identical results, or even desirable results are always obtained from Baptism. Just last week someone gave me a story about five churches in a small Texas town. Perfect timing I thought. A Presbyterian Church, of course a Baptist Church, a Methodist Church, an Episcopal Church and a Synagogue.

All five of them has a horrible squirrel problem. Each handled it differently, but when they went to their interfaith council meeting they shared their stories.

The Presbyterian minister said they had called a council and that it was decided that if the squirrels were there it was predestined--So they did nothing.

In the Baptist church the squirrels had taken up residency in the baptistery so the Baptist decided to put a

cover on it and drown them. Somehow miraculously they escaped and the next week there were twice as many splashing around in the water.

The Methodist decided that it was not their right to harm any of God's creatures. So they trapped them and took them to the edge of town and released them. The squirrels beat them back to the church.

The Episcopal priest kind of smirked and reported that he had baptized the squirrels and registered them as members of the church and now he only sees them on Christmas and Easter.

The Rabbi meanwhile sat silent til one of them asked him what they had done. He replied, "We are a people of great faith and tradition and a people of the Law". I captured one of the squirrels performed the Ritual of the Brisque and I have not seen the first squirrel since.

What happened to the Episcopal Church is not what is intended by Baptism. But rather when, in a few moments, we baptize Sarah Elizabeth O'Connell, consider it is for her, and as we renew our Baptismal Covenant, it can be for us the beginning or restarting of a precious journey. And, I would offer, that if you take the text of today's Gospel with you it will be all you need.

**"When they heard that he had they followed him
And when he went ashore he saw a great crowd"**

Teach little Sarah and remind us to always follow Christ and, in the following of Christ to share in the Community of Faith.

For it is in following and in community that our Faith is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. It is in community and not breaking away and arguing over things that God will have the final say over, anyway, that we learn the richness we can experience and the growth we can attain through the differences of others.

“And he had compassion for them and cured their sick”
Teach little Sarah and remind us to emulate Christ in all that we do.

To make his compassion our own compassion. To reach out to others, even when it may not always be convenient--when we ourselves may be tired or troubled because of our own circumstances. For it is in our compassion and our passion for Christ that others who are sick, injured or feel inadequate or isolated in any way find the healing power of Jesus Christ. I have to tell you, if you do not believe in the power of the compassion of Christ or the passion of the Love of Christ, just walk by the door of the library on Thursday morning as the intercessory prayer team meets and feel the power of the Holy Spirit. I could say the room rocking and rolling but my kids would say “Dad don’t be a nerd”

“The disciples came to him and said, “This is a

deserted place and the hour is now late, send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away. You give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Teach little Sarah and remind us that if we have hearts and attitudes of abundance there is no need for a single person to starve, there is no need for a single person or family to go homeless or families sleeping in cars.

Not vans, not buses but cars

You want to see hearts of abundance come on Holy Trinity night to the St. George Soup Kitchen. Hearts of abundance preparing food for 100 plus including women and children. Hearts of gratitude giving thanks as they leave filled—not only with food, but with the love of Christ.

We live in a world that basically looks through scarcity colored glasses. And from that comes hoarding, and greed. From that comes putting more aside than there could ever be rainy days to soak it up

From that vision of scarcity the divide of humanity deepens, and we see the fear growing in eyes that maybe

once were our neighbors but whose house has been foreclosed upon. The fear growing in eyes that faithfully performed many of the jobs that we wouldn't want to perform, who now faced the uncertainty of whether they even have enough gas to get to that job.

Teach Sarah and remind us that it was not a fluke, it was not a magic trick that allowed Jesus to feed 5000 men plus women and children. It was instilling throughout the whole crowd a spirit of oneness and a spirit of sharing.

Finally we go back to the beginning to find the key that allows us to live this life in Christ.

"Jesus withdrew in a boat to a deserted place."

Teach little Sarah and remind each of us that in rest, that in solitude, we can find that oneness with Christ that allows us to be the hands and feet the eyes and ears, the heart and soul of the living God. Teach us to be still and know that you are God.

If you take this short passage of Scripture, only 8 verses long and you read it to Little Sarah and if we read it, mark it and inwardly digest it then the power of your Holy Baptism will be an event from which the world will not only take notice but it will be changed.