

Epiphany 6 - February 14, 2010

The Rev. Graham Bland

I have been afflicted this week with a serious ear-worm ... watching CTV! “I believe in the power that comes, from a world brought together as one ...”

Now I realize that by my mentioning this, you may catch the affliction. That is partly my intention! Maybe you’ve already caught it? OK, how many of you already have this tune singing in your ears?

Now a good tune can carry you along. Armies and freedom movements and churches have always known this. To sing it helps us to carry what we believe, or it helps what we believe to carry us!

Anyway, now that the tune is playing in your head, we’ll come back to it in a minute or two; just let it hum in the background (did I hear someone say ‘annoyingly’?) .

Today, in Baptism, we affirm our belief in God. The themes of Baptism flow together today and they carry us on our journey.

1. One thing Baptism does is tell us how precious we are to God

Jesus was bathed in light and the voice of God was heard saying: “This is my Son, my Chosen, Listen to Him.” At Jesus’ baptism, similar words: “You are my Son, my Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

St. Paul says that not only was Jesus transfigured and changed, but that “All of us are being transformed” into his likeness.

The Bible wants us to be bold enough to hear the voice of God speaking here today, to these children whom we have baptized in Jesus’ name, reminding us how precious they are:

“Isabella, you are my daughter, my beloved, with you I am well pleased.

Logan, you are my son, my beloved, with you I am well pleased.

Adrian, you are my son, my beloved, with you I am well pleased.

Carolynn, you are my daughter, my beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

Of course, this is not only Christian wisdom. It is our common human understanding, that children are gifts from the hand of God.

Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man. **Rabindranath Tagore (Hindu Brahmin and writer of the 19th & 20th centuries)**

Just listen to the story of these children's names:

Isabella means 'consecrated to God'; and **Marta**, "a lady" ... ***a woman consecrated to God.***

Logan, Gaelic "from the hollow" deeply connected to the earth and to nature; **Byron**, a rustic dwelling, a place of hospitality ... ***a hospitable & earthy man.***

Adrian in Gk means "rich", also an early Roman emperor and the only English pope; and **Russell**, red-haired in Fr. ... ***a fiery leader.***

Carolynn, a "beautiful woman"; and **Louisa**, who fights with honour ... ***a beautiful woman famous in battle.***

So many of our human strivings are summed up in these names, so much of what God has made holy in us ... devotion; hospitality; earthiness; leadership; passion; beauty; fighting for the good.

These children are holy. We believe that God is moving in their lives now and since their birth and into their futures. We claim the power of God's Spirit in their lives.

1. Today these children begin to share in the ministry of God's people, in our ministry.

St. Paul declares: "Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Freedom to trust in God's mercy and grace. And because we are called by God's grace, we are free to hope in God and so to act with boldness ... and not to lose heart ... to live courageous lives.

1. Baptism –these children's and our own - reminds us that the power of death is no match for the power of God.

A survey in BC published this week suggests that the Anglican Church of Canada faces the threat of extinction. Yet the power of death does not rule over the life of God's people as we live in Christ.

The threat of things passing away makes us want to turn them into sacred cows and hang onto them for dear life. Peter, James and John wanted to institutionalize the Transfiguration by building 3 chapels up on the Mount. But Jesus was moving on from there.

God does not need to be preserved, packaged or frozen. Each moment is its own new venture into trust when we live each moment in God. We do not need to be afraid of what comes next.

When the Wardens and new parish council members met on Wednesday, I heard the faith of a community that is not afraid to move forward with God. Yes, St. James is a community in the process of discerning its next steps in ministry. Yet, this is not a process of anxious waiting for a new Rector, nor does it need to be. I heard on Wednesday, that this community is:

- . Continuing to move forward with health and vitality
- . Reaching out into the community so that St. James' is known as the Church in the Village and not just the Village in the Church
- . Wanting to use its many gifts to take leadership in the Canadian Church beyond St. James', to help re-vitalize it and bring it to new life in God.

This is what I'm hearing you say about the mission of this parish church. It is a privilege to journey with you for a while and to encourage you in this work.

The other night someone said something like this: "We must not expect our new rector to show us the Way, but rather invite him/her to enable us to move forward on the path we are already on."

That's an exciting and life-giving approach to this interim time. It implies that God is the guide. And I will do my best to nourish and support you in that spirit while I'm here.

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So is that tune still humming along in your head?

You know I had this crazy idea that today we might baptize it too and turn it into an anchor for faith. Now I admit it's got its shortcomings and that's the point ... there's an opportunity here to redeem it,

It needs redeeming in at least two ways. First, grammatically. Secondly, so that it points to the power of God that you and I need if we are to take up the calling that the Spirit of God is planting in our hearts.

In our own strength, we can easily lose heart. In God's strength, even our weakness becomes strength.

So, if this Olympic Song is becoming an ear-worm for you, I want to challenge you to find new words for it to reflect what you believe and that will help to anchor that deep within you.

"Believe!" is an important invitation (toque) ... As we have named our belief in this Baptism today, so we must be clear about what beliefs we are carrying and whether they are strong enough to carry us.

In Baptism, we have affirmed:

- . We are precious and loved by God
- . We are stronger together than alone
- . The power of love is stronger than the power of death in our world

Perhaps the song might go something like this:

I believe in the power of God to bring our world together in love
I believe with God as our guide
You and I will find we
are free to fly!

OK! There you go! There's my effort!

Folks ... It's good to be with you. Thank you for welcoming me here. May God bless us as we journey together.