

The Reverend Patricia Phaneuf Alexander  
The Third Sunday after Pentecost ~ 9 June 2024  
St. Dunstan's, Bethesda  
2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1  
Psalm 138  
Mark 3:20-35

Twenty-three years ago today, my husband and I welcomed our first child into the world, and our lives changed – forever. In the weeks and months leading up to William's birth, Randy and I prepared, as best we could, for this little one's arrival: We read the books, bought the gear, washed the clothes, took the classes...and then we waited. We were nervous, but we felt as though we had done everything we could to get ready. How hard could it be? There were two of us, after all, and we were adults. It couldn't be *that* difficult to add a baby to the mix.

Let's just say that we were *clueless*. We had no idea how such a tiny person could control pretty much everything: When we slept, when we ate, when we showered, how we organized our time and our space, how we traveled...you name it.

We thought it would get a little bit easier as our second and then our third children were born – *Why* did we assume that, exactly? – but it turned out that that every time we added another member to our family the dynamic shifted. We went from two on one, to two on two, to being completely outnumbered.

More importantly, Randy and I changed, inherently, because we were responsible to and for another person – then two, then three. Not to mention the dogs.

And we wouldn't have it any other way.

The truth is, whenever someone new joins a household – in whatever ways they do (marriage, children, extended family, roommates) things change. That addition becomes a catalyst. The constellation of beings – all with wants, needs, desires of their own – expands. Suddenly there are competing demands. And everyone and everything within that unit adjusts, accordingly.

I liken it to riding the Metro at rush hour: The car may feel full already, and then the train pulls into a station, the doors open, and more passengers board. Those in the car already, if they are polite and hospitable, reposition themselves to make room. We've probably all done this: Moving further in, grabbing a different pole or hand strap, perhaps standing to offer a seat to someone who needs it more.

*We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.*

In just a few minutes, the household of God here at St. Dunstan's will grow as we welcome little Rollin Gates Anderson Gomez into the family of faith. We will baptize RG and anoint his forehead with the sign of the Cross, marking him as Christ's own forever. Forever. Nothing can ever take that identity away from him – no matter what he does over the course of his life or what the world does to him. Thanks be to God.

As the *Book of Common Prayer* tells us, in Baptism RG becomes a member of "Christ's Body, the Church, and [an inheritor] of the kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> This is what is called an *ontological* change, which is to say a change in RG's very being, his essence. To be clear, RG already is a beloved child of God, precious in God's sight and made in God's very image; he has been all his life, so that's nothing new. What *is* new today is that RG enters into something far bigger than himself. His family expands beyond his parents and siblings and their extended circle of relatives – which is a Very Good Thing.

---

<sup>1</sup> *BCP*, p. 858

Please don't hear that as any kind of referendum on this or any earthly family: That is, after all, how we first come to experience and know love and nurture, security and safety. Rather, expanding RG's family circle means that he will be intimately connected – forever – with people who are like him and are very different from him, those who affirm him and those who challenge him. He will be responsible to and for them – as they will to and for him.

In today's Gospel Jesus asks, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" and then – uncharacteristically – goes on to answer His own question by gesturing to those around Him: "Here are my mother and my brothers!" (Mark 3:34). As one New Testament scholar puts it, "Jesus radically redefines members of his family—in antiquity, **the** most basic social organization—as all who do God's will."<sup>2</sup>

This suggests that the boundary between RG's primary family and the household of God is *permeable* – like a gated rail fence, rather than a high, impenetrable wall. As he grows, RG will, God willing, be protected from harm within the enclosure of *this* family, *and* from there he will be able to move out into his larger family, learning to navigate difference and helping to break down divisions. In short, in his Baptism today RG is given a new title and a new job description: As a Christian, he is invited to participate in God's work in the world.

The theologian Paul Wadell writes:

There is no shortage of barriers that need to be dismantled if God's dream ... is to become a reality. We create barriers through our attitudes toward others. We create barriers when we freeze people out or simply ignore them. We create barriers when we refuse to talk to certain people. We create barriers when we refuse to deal with problems that weaken relationships. We create barriers when we refuse to give ourselves to others. We create barriers when we hold on to grudges and refuse to

---

<sup>2</sup> C. Clifton Black, Princeton Theological Seminary, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-10-2/commentary-on-mark-320-35-5>

forgive. We create barriers when we nurture cynicism, bitterness, and resentment instead of seeking peace.<sup>3</sup>

God's work, RG's work, then, is all about dismantling those barriers between individuals and among peoples. It's about helping to realize the kingdom "on earth, as it is in heaven." That's a heavy mantle to place on the shoulders of a one-year-old, isn't it? But that, my friends, is the call of Baptism. And not just RG's Baptism, but yours, and mine, as well. This is the work that we are *all* given to do.

Today, as this congregation receives RG Anderson Gomez into the larger, cosmic household of God, things will change. RG will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit and will be marked and empowered to go out and make a difference in our world. Imagine what God can and will do through him, now and in the future! It's exciting and humbling to consider.

*And...*

As we welcome this newest member into the Church (not just St. Dunstan's, but the Church universal), we cannot help but be changed, too. The constellation of us Christians will shift as RG enters the community with his own wants, needs, and desires – and his own unique call to do God's work in the world.

This is where my Metro analogy breaks down, because – hopefully, God willing – we will do more than just shuffle around a bit to make room for him. Hopefully, God willing, we will allow ourselves to be changed by this Baptism, too.

In a moment we all – not just Julie and Tony and Karen and Paul – will take vows to support RG in his life in Christ. More than that, we will promise, with God's help, to do God's work in the world. **Please don't say it if you have no intention of doing it.** But if you *do* aspire to walk in the Way of Jesus, however haltingly and imperfectly, then let those promises really sink in. Allow

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul Wadell, *Becoming Friends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), p. 36.

them to change you – so that you might live just a bit differently tomorrow than you did yesterday.

May RG's Baptism inspire each of us to grow more and more into our own identity as members of the household of God. May we re-commit ourselves to the work we have been given to do as Christians. Imagine what God can and will do through each of us, now and in the future!

*Amen.*