

The Baptism of James Rowan Robertson

Pentecost 7 2024

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In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Amen.

What a joy it is to gather this morning as we baptize James Rowan Robertson! Thank you Trevor and Robin for bringing James to baptism and thank you Emy and Franco for being his sponsors and making these gorgeous baptismal promises on his behalf, sharing in those promises with him, until he is old enough to affirm those promises in his own voice.

James' sister Kelly was baptized here in 2021 and her baptism gospel reading came from Mark and now today James is being baptized along side Mark's Gospel. You both share a baptismal gospel... and I know this is only the beginning of having to share things with your sister!

But in all seriousness how wonderful is that! You share a baptism Gospel with your sister and you share the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection with this entire room of people - with the congregation of St. Andrew's, with family and friends and with the students here from VST from 5 different denominations and from different countries. But not just a story: today you enter into a shared life in Christ with all of us, with the great communion of saints who have gone before you and with the whole created order. Today you are baptized in the death and resurrection of Jesus through which God was reconciling all things, in heaven and on earth, to himself in Christ. Reconciling all things: you, all of humanity and all of the natural world and that's why the baptismal vows aren't just about us or the church or humanity but they also include a vow for creation because we are called to be ambassadors of Christ's reconciliation of *all things*. Baptism is deeply personal and wildly communal all at once.

Our gospel reading from Mark reminds us that to be called into relationship with Jesus *is* to be sent out with him, you cannot separate the calling and the sending. To be called into relationship with Jesus is to be sent, to be co-missioned, sharing with Jesus in the mission of God, sharing in His proclamation that "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe" (1:15). In the same way, to be baptized, to be submerged in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, is also to be sent, sent out to walk in his ways, with his love, and in witness to his Kingdom, to the reconciliation of all things.

And we get glimpses of what this means by, of course, watching Jesus in the scriptures as he eats with outcasts and sinners, serves the poor and the women, tells us that the first would be last, that the peacemakers are blessed and to love one another as He has loved us, a love that takes him to cross and through death and into life.

We also learn this from watching others, our baptismal sponsors and our families and the saints who have gone before us in the faith. And we learn, as Paul's reminds us this morning, that this life is not so much about our spiritual successes or mystical experiences but rather how God's power is made perfect in our weakness.

And we learn the pattern of Jesus death and resurrection in the sacraments, God's out pouring of life that incorporates us into God's own life, through the elements of water, light, oil, bread and wine¹. The very stuff of creation.

The baptism we celebrate today is a one-time sacrament of a lifetime pattern. As one author has put it: [Our lives are] "death and resurrection, over and over again, day after day, as God reaches down into our deepest graves and with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead wrests us from our pride, our apathy, our fear, our prejudice, our anger, our hurt and our despair"². God reaches deep within and calls us beloved, loving our hearts and lives into fullness, into ripeness, as we grow and respond.

So as you begin your life in Christ today James know that you have absolutely wonderful parents, a sister to share with for a lifetime, and communities of faith here and Victoria that will help you grow, will grow because of you and be ambassadors of Christ with you.

And as Geoff, Kate, Christian and Allen, Kate, Patricia and professor Mary from VST all head home today know how grateful I am to have spent a week learning with you, how grateful we are as congregation that you came so that we might formed together in Christ across churches, across cultures with our hands in the soil.

As the scholar Rowan Williams says: "The way I am to be sanctified and made like Christ is not your way, but it is only formed in and with you. That is the glory and paradox of Church".

Amen.

¹ Thanks to Rowan Williams' Being Disciples lecture for these 3 levels of learning.

² Evans, Rachel. *Searching for Sunday*. Nashville, Nelson Books: 2015. Page 21.