

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
Baptism of Our Lord, January 14, 2018

Change Your World – Live the Revolution

Rejoice In the Person God Has Gifted You To Be

1. In Christ, We Are New People
2. In Baptism, We Are Dressed for Success

Galatians 3:26-27

So, how well is YOUR version of a “safe place” working out for you? We all have one or two of them, don't we? When we were kids, God willing we had safe places, safe people, safe routines. Is life really all that different now?

Maybe a “safe place” for you is **FINANCES**—are all things in order? You have a budget...a financial planner...a 403b...a Roth IRA...three to six months of income for a rainy day. Are you set?

Maybe your safe place is your **PROFESSION**? You have your degree, maybe even an advanced one. You are marketable! You have a professional network. You have the respect of your colleagues. Continuing education is who you are. Sharp and on top of your game!

Is your safe place your **HEALTH**? 30 minutes of cardio a day—cross training even! Probiotics, vitamins, Lose IT, Fitbit, you know your target heart rate...and those regular physicals especially after age 50!

Do you hope to be “Teflon Man”...”Teflon Woman”—nothing sticks to you? Or have you lived enough life to know **the thorns and thistles** of Eden's curse from our original sin in the garden? Financial crashes like 2008 can strip away the dream and tie our hands and our budgets. Job loss due to downsizing or age can burst the professional bubble we have built for ourselves and bring fear. Pain in our chest, aching in our bones, the thinning of the hair can bring **mortality** nudging or hurtling into our safe place!

What about **MORTALITY**—that we will NOT live forever--that **DEATH** is somewhere around the corner—that ONE DAY we will meet God face to face? What does your Safe Place look like for **THAT**?

Some people feel good about forever because they *STRIVE* to live a moral life—you know, the 10 commandments. We survey our world and we think, “I could be like him or her...but I'm not. I'm better! ☺”

Some people feel good about forever because they believe that their opinion matters and that God is not “judgy” and that he is reasonable and that he loves all of us just the way we are. But when the hair thins, the joints hurt, a loved one passes away, and mortality is real and close, all of a sudden the “firm ground” of our own goodness seems not so solid as we remember our sins, as we see the faces of those who KNOW our sins! And if THEY know, God knows! And, deep down, we sense that God requires perfect love from us for him and for our neighbor, and that he doesn’t settle for “good enough” or “better than you”.

In the end, we come to realize that none of our “safe places” will keep us safe! Where is the FREEDOM we thought we were squirreling away?

Friends, welcome to the human race. Welcome to the human condition apart from God. But more importantly today, welcome to this house of God as GOD weighs in to remind us, **“REJOICE IN THE PERSON I HAVE GIFTED YOU TO BE! In Christ, I Have Made You NEW! In Your Baptism, I Have Dressed You For Success.”**

1. IN CHRIST, WE ARE NEW PEOPLE

I don’t know how many of you are Star Wars fans, but did you know that Yoda was Greek? Good Greek puts the most important words first. Think about it. “Hmmm, fearful you are, Skywalker.” So here is our text—a bit wooden, but good Greek. ***“ALL sons of God you are through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many as into Christ were baptized...with Christ have clothed yourselves.”***

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? That is not meant to be trick question. What does it mean to believe in him? **Does your faith bring you a sense of safety...of JOY?**

Jesus once said, ***“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”*** He once said, ***“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”***

And the Father once said about his Son, ***“The blood of my son cleanses you from all sin.”***

In days long ago, a man named Job once confessed: ***“I know that my Redeemer lives and that on the last day He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God, I myself will see him with my own eyes...I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”***

And the most beloved passage in the Christian message, ***“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”***

That sounds a lot like ALL OF OUR EGGS in one basket--a “safe place” for **MORTALITY anchored** in one person—but NOT in you or in me or in our efforts, but in Jesus. It is as if the Spirit of God who wrote the Bible drew a circle on the ground with the blood of Jesus, labeled it

“**JESUS...FOR SALVATION**”, placed us into that circle through faith in Jesus—and then declared us to be **NEW--NEW PEOPLE—“Sons of God”!** No longer the children of “John and Ruth” or of “Paul and Rhoda”—*children limited* because of our parents, children of sinners who die because of sin—but “**SONS OF GOD**”!

My dear friends, what a deal! When we believe in Jesus as our Savior, we ARE sons of God—heirs of his Kingdom! We are safe—in a place that is Rock solid compared to a Roth IRA or an advanced degree or probiotics or one’s belief that God is not “judgy”. The Spirit says, “Stand here through faith and all will be well. There is no fear in Jesus. There is no lasting guilt over what you have done. There is only his blood covering sin...and death is but a new beginning.”

APPLICATION Raise your hand if you...if you do bad things...if you are a sinner. Who is the worst sinner you know in this room?

When I look at myself and the space I take up on the planet labeled “**Nathan Strobel**”, and when I think of what I have done, and when I think of the hurtful things that I THINK--that “if he or she knew they would be hurt,” and when I remember that God KNOWS “**Nathan Strobel**” better than I know “**Nathan Strobel**, the circle of “**Nathan Strobel**” isn’t such a comfortable or safe place to be.

But God wants us to trust that standing in Jesus and ALL that he is—believing in him--takes away “Nathan” and leaves only Jesus—or the status of Jesus as a “son of God”. **Incredible!**

But can I be sure of this declaration of God? Well, if God is real, if his love is real, if Jesus is real, then his promises are real, and faith takes God at his word! If HE says, “Standing in Jesus through faith makes you my son,” then **whether man or woman, boy or girl**, we have the status of “sons of God’s household”. Heirs together in Jesus!

The Bible calls Jesus the firstborn over God’s house. He is our big brother who has paved the way for us to follow—the HOW and the WHY to live--WHERE to stand! In his blood--real forgiveness so that our memory doesn’t matter, our conscience no longer condemns—for the voice of our big brother sets the tone for the household: *“I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full. Believe in me and you will live, even though you die.”*

2. IN BAPTISM, WE ARE DRESSED FOR SUCCESS

Sons of God, huh? That is awesome! But don’t sons of the household get to wear the family crest, the family colors, to connect us to what really matters?

In the Roman world, a son of the household did not truly achieve that status until age 15 when he was finally free of his guardian and began to dress the part of being a “son”.

That picture Paul seems to use here when he speaks of our sonship and then wraps it into our baptisms. ***“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”***

What is the blessing of baptism? What benefit is there to simple water touched to the body in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Such a simple, seemingly unimpressive thing! Is baptism a “nice ritual”, a “church thing”, a dedication to God to “raise the child in the church”? Yes...but NO, for it is so much more!

When it comes to baptism, it is always good to listen to the One who ***gave*** it, who owns it—rather like Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper—apostrophe S. It is HIS supper. His sacrament. HIS blessing to lay out for us and to inform us. So it is with baptism!

Here, the Spirit of God states that baptism gives us a new set of clothes to wear, ***spiritual*** clothes. Rather like *NIKE, Hollister, or Forever 21*—but not really. You see, when we are baptized, Jesus is our brand, Jesus is our “logo wear”. HE is whom we wear on the first day of school, for that first date, for every date, on our wedding day, for every day. And, most importantly when we stand before our God for judgment. “Jesus” is who we are wearing when we don’t feel so free of our sin or dressed for success.

In the dark of night—when sleep escapes us--when worry creeps into our hearts and minds, remember whom we are wearing. Our logo wear will say to us, ***“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”***

In the reality of our mortality, when the day comes that we are dying...and we haven’t died before...and there is fear, look down at whom we are wearing and our logo wear will say, ***“In all things I am at work for your good..and I will bring you safely home, O son, O daughter of the King!”***

To the persistent voice of our conscience and to the memory of what we have done, our Spirit-wear proclaims, ***“It is for FREEDOM that Christ has set you free! You are a son—an heir--of the King!”***

In all of life and in death, so clothed in our Jesus, the child of God is able to say, ***“I thank you, God, that I am free! I thank you for the gift of my new clothes in baptism. Freedom in Jesus that will last, that will stand the test of time, that will carry me safely home!”***

CONCLUSION So, problems with your “safe places”? No worries! **BE FAITHFUL** with the Creator’s gifts and He will take care of the blessing. **LOOK** where you are standing...in the blood of Jesus. **REMEMBER** how God has dressed you in your baptism—and in the end, all will be well! What a JOY to stand in Jesus, my friends! For this day and every day HE is WHO we are! New! And safe! And free! Amen.