

7.26.2026 Trinity 8 (Baptism)

In this world, and perhaps especially in our culture, many of us are taught that self-reliance is the path to true freedom, that working hard and earning our own way through life prevents us from being indebted to others, builds character, and gives us the autonomy to make our own choices on our own terms. There are certainly rewards to be found in this world by those who rely entirely on their own ability to work hard, perform well, and make a name for themselves, but when we set our sights higher than this material world, or to use the words of Scripture, when we set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2), we're reminded that the Christian life, the abundant, everlasting life that Jesus came to give us, begins, continues, and stretches into eternity not by our own effort apart from God, but by His grace through faith.

Our culture celebrates independence and self-reliance, but this morning we were witnesses to the truth that what we need most cannot be gained by our own human effort, but instead must be received as a Divine gift. Our greatest need in this life, and for the life to come, is to be brought back into right relationship with God, and this most desperate need is perfectly fulfilled in God's greatest gift - the gift of His only-begotten Son, the gift of Salvation. Listen to the way St. Paul assured us all, and perhaps especially those who've been taught to earn their own way in all things, that Salvation is in fact a gift. Paul wrote, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Salvation is not our work. Salvation *is the gift of God*, given by grace through faith, and the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, especially the baptism of infants, provides us with a beautiful image of that priceless gift given. In this Sacrament we receive what we need most. As the minister physically pours out water, God spiritually pours out His gift of grace, and we're brought back into right relationship with Him. Baptism, as St. Peter declared, *"now saves you"* (1 Peter 3:21), and one of the ways baptism is described by Jesus is through an image of new birth.

In a conversation with Nicodemus, our Lord said, *"Verily, verily, I say unto*

thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The kingdom of God, Jesus said, comes by way of new birth, and this new birth imagery again brings to mind infants, and parallels between physical birth and spiritual birth fill our minds. For example, regardless of how independent and self-reliant a person may claim to be, years before the day of their physical birth, they made none of the plans necessary to initiate that miracle. They didn’t set up their parents on their first date. They had no choice as to where or how their parents would meet, or when dad would finally muster up the courage to propose to mom. Think of Soren, she didn’t plan her own baby shower, or choose where she’d be born, and even when the pregnancy came to full term and she was ready to live outside her mom’s body, still she didn’t make the choice to leave the womb, or rely on her own ability to do so. Instead, she relied completely on the grace and strength and ability that God gave her mom to deliver her into this world.

Likewise, our entry into the Kingdom of God isn’t a process that’s initiated by us. We rely not on ourselves, but entirely on the grace of God for this new birth. Our condition after the fall of Adam is such that we can’t turn to faith by our own natural strength (Article X). Jesus said, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them...*” (John 6:44). It’s true that “*we love Him, because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). So as independent and self-reliant as we might pretend to be, what we need most we cannot provide for ourselves. What we need most must be given to us by God and received as a gift, and therefore thanks be to God for our Salvation, for He spared not His own Son, and through new birth brought us out of the darkness of the womb and into the glorious light of an entirely new and everlasting existence.

Our culture would have us learn a lesson about the value of independence and self-reliance, but in the cry of an infant we’re reminded that the first lesson we learned in this life is how much we need one another. As newborns we all helplessly cried out because we relied completely on our parents to provide for our every need, and not only for a short time, but for years to come, and this foundational lesson about how deeply dependent we truly are is also seen in infant baptism. We know from the historical writings of the Church Fathers, that from the earliest days of Christianity, parents have brought their children to the Church to receive what we all need most - *the gift of God* given in the Sacrament of Baptism. Christian parents, who’ve desired to raise

their children, not to be Christians, but as Christians, have heard and received that which our Lord said, *“Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 19:14).

According to our Savior Christ, the kingdom of heaven belongs to little children, and in the loving act of letting them come to Him by bringing them to the waters of Baptism, we recognize how much we need one another. Think once again of St. Paul’s statement, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith,”* and consider how often it is the faith of another that positions us to receive the grace of God. For example, when Jesus raised Jairus’s daughter from the dead, the girl made no profession of faith in Christ. Rather, it was Jairus who came to our Lord in faith and petitioned God for this miracle, and Jesus said to this heartbroken father, *“Do not fear, only believe”* (Mark 5:36), and by grace, through the faith of Jairus, God performed the miracle that raised the girl from the dead.

On a different occasion, another father came to Jesus on behalf of his son who was possessed by a demon. This man said to our Lord, *“If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him, If you can! All things are possible for one who believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, Lord I believe; help my unbelief!”* After this profession of faith, Jesus commanded the demon to leave the boy, to never enter him again, and he took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose (Mark 9:14-27). Again, this child made no profession of faith, but by the grace of God through the faith of his father, who proclaimed *Lord I believe*, the boy was healed.

It wasn’t the faith of these children, but the faith of a parent that cried out to our Lord and God to perform these miracles, and there are many more examples in Scripture which illustrate the truth that it’s often the faith of another that positions those they love to receive the grace of God. We could talk about the Gospel account which tells the story of a few men who were so desperate to help their paralyzed friend that they tore open the roof of a housetop so they could lower him into the presence of our Lord. The text tells us that *“when Jesus saw their faith,”* when He saw the faith of those who took such extreme measures to bring their friend to Him, He said to the paralyzed man, *“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven,”* and He healed

him, saying, “*Get up, take your mat and go home*” (Matthew 9:2-6). Jesus saw their faith, a faith that carried their paralyzed friend to a place where he could receive the grace of God.

In Holy Scripture we see the faith of parents and friends being the means by which God gracefully brings physical and spiritual life and health to those they love, and regarding baptism specifically, you may also remember a number of examples in which the faith of the head of a household brought the gift of God given in baptism to all who were under their roof. For example, when the Philippian jailer asked St. Paul what he must do to be saved, Paul responded, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household*” (Acts 16:31), and that evening, he and his household were all baptized. By the grace of God, the jailer’s faith brought the blessing of baptism to all who were in his house, and the same model of household baptism is also described in the account of Lydia’s household and the household of Stephanas (Acts 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

All of these examples point to the truth that the biblical model of grace and faith is not one of independence and self-reliance, but of dependence and the necessity of community. We are truly many members of one Body, branches on one Vine, sheep of one flock with one Good Shepherd. While the world, and especially our culture, preaches the value of self-reliance, the Triune God of heaven and earth, who exists eternally in a perfect relation of three Divine Persons, clearly created us, in His image, for love and community, and this morning one precious soul was carried by her parents in faith to the waters of Baptism, and received into the eternal community that our Savior Christ calls His Church. Not because of any good work she did. Soren has no reason to boast in her Salvation, because like ours, it is the gift of God given by grace through faith.