

**Homily Preached
by Doug King
June 20, 2004
John 1:19-39a**

One of the things that always comes up when I meet with a family to talk about the baptism of their child is what will happen if the baptisee cries, and or screams, and or thrashes around during the baptism. I tell the parents that it is a no-lose situation for the baby in question. If they are angelic and quiet the congregation will love it and if they are rambunctious and noisy the congregation will love watching me get through it. In an odd way that is very telling about the reason we baptize babies in the first place and what it tells us about the nature of God and the nature of who the church is called to be.

Whatever babies do during a baptism they are doing exactly what they are supposed to do. Baptism is not about what the child being baptized does. Baptism is about what the Holy Spirit does and what the Holy Spirit does through us. The Holy Spirit draws these parents, Jennifer and Gian Marc into our midst and in response to presenting their daughter Isabella for Baptism we have made a promise. As a community we have promised to help raise Isabella, in the Christian faith. This is a lofty goal, which will be broken down into many small pieces over the next twenty years. It will mean a gentle and guiding hand in the nursery Sunday mornings; it will mean the preparation of Sunday school lessons on the Prodigal Son and Jesus the Shepherd and the serving of cases of graham crackers and gallons of apple juice over the years. It will mean sore backs from sleeping on the floor in Maine when she is in Senior Highs.

What is so fascinating about the Sacrament of Baptism is the complex and subtle interplay between our role and the Holy Spirit's role in making it efficacious. God will need to work through us to make this blessing stick. We can chant all the words we want over by that font, but if Isabella grows up in a church that does not reach out to love and care for her in meaningful ways through every stage of her childhood how can the church become her home?

Oddly enough we find ourselves in a similar role to that of John the Baptist. He is very clear with his questioners that he is not the Messiah, he is not God. He goes so far as to say that he is not even worthy to untie the thong of the Messiah's sandals, in other words he is not even worthy enough to be a slave to the Messiah.

And yet, if he does not "make straight the way of the Lord," if he does not prepare for Christ's arrival, how can it happen? It is John, human ordinary John who is called upon to baptize the Son of God. It is through John's baptism that the Spirit descends upon Jesus. John was an essential tool of the Spirit to bring about the arrival of the Messiah.

When we as a community engage in the act of baptism, in the midst of falling in love with this baby in our midst we might be wise to be in awe of the journey we are promising to help lead. We too are called to be essential tools of the Spirit. All of those little choices that come before us are in actuality cosmic opportunities. The chance to volunteer in a Sunday school classroom is a cosmic opportunity to be an essential tool of the Spirit. The chance to join the Senior Highs on a mission trip is a cosmic opportunity to be an essential tool of the Spirit. These actions which appear mundane to us are actually filled with significance by the presence of God.

When two of John's disciples hear John proclaiming Jesus as the "Lamb of God" they begin to follow after Jesus. Jesus asks them why they are following him and they ask him where he is staying. Jesus does not describe the place to them. He beckons them forward with an invitation, "Come, and see." As much as I wish there were words that could be said from this pulpit that would bring us into the presence of God, there are no words or incantations to accomplish that feat. God exists visibly in our presence by the actions we share together in being the church and inviting each other to "Come, and see." The ways in which we love and care for each other, the ways we play and laugh and work together, the ways we teach each other are how God is embodied in our midst.

It is our job as the church to give Isabella something to come and see; to invite her into a community of faith where she will be loved and nurtured along every step of her journey to adulthood. We need not, and trust me we do not, know all of the how's and why's of our God. The children in our midst will always have more questions than we will ever have answers. What we have to offer are our actions.

Children are a gift in the midst of the church. They remind us that there are lessons that need to be taught and need to be learned about this faith of ours. They remind us that the journey of faith is not one taken as an individual but one taken in community. As we create for them, we create for ourselves, and we pray that we create for our God a church worthy of the name of the body of Christ. We join them in receiving that splash of water as we receive God's grace filled love through no work of our own. We join them in the journey of learning about ourselves and our God. We join them in needing this community to show us the presence of God in our midst. We have been invited on a journey to follow our God, "Come, and see." Amen.