

02 November 2008
Fr. Richard L. Green

I don't know if you've noticed this phenomenon that's going on around Saint Stephen's Church, but we're in the midst of a bit of a baby boom. One of them is Colin, who's right here, and John Luke just came in, and Jonah's around here and young Luke Askeland didn't make it today, being a week old. It's a remarkable thing.

I had the opportunity less than twelve hours after little Luke Askeland was born to be in the hospital and to hold him. He's a little guy, he's seven pounds and something and looking into his face or holding any of these others and looking into their little faces—it's amazing. It's an amazing thing because there's so much before them in life.

In baptism, we all make this vow to be part of their bringing up, for better or for worse; we're all going to have a part in this. And the culture will, too. And there's all of this, in a sense, this *taking on* that these babies have before them. How just right now, they're just little food processors. And absorbers of everything.

We had a little run through for the service earlier this morning and Colin was just taking it all in. He was looking up at these light fixtures and at people's faces and just taking it all in and that's all becoming part of him. And as the days go by, all of these babies take on so much.

We hear in that reading from First John, "See what love the Father's given us that we should be called children of God" and that's what we are. They are so clearly children of God, infants of God. And they'll grow just as all of us did and they'll take on all this stuff and some of it will be really great and some of it will not.

We have this kind of gauzy, hearts-and-flowers view of what life is going to be like. We look into their little pure faces and all that we can see is this beauty and loveliness but, you know, they're coming into the same world that we live in. And they're going to take on some stuff that none of us would wish on them. And what we are here to do is to help prepare them for that so that as the years go, their lives will be formed in the first place so there isn't a whole lot of unlearning to do as they get older.

But the process for all of us is one of learning and becoming and it never stops. Christie is not an infant. You may have noticed. And she too is being baptized today. And her life has already accumulated from day one to this point what the world and her family and all her experience has given her.

Now somewhere in here there's this tipping point where all this taking on and learning, it becomes sort of like baggage and cargo. You take all this stuff on. But if we look at the Beatitudes, it looks to me like there is a point in which that process becomes one of letting go. Letting go of a lot of the stuff, the cargo, the baggage that we take on.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. That, to me, speaks to that detachment, not having all that baggage to try to get through the eye of the needle with, as it were. Not having all that physical and emotional and spiritual and psychological and cultural baggage that weighs us down.

Blessed are those who mourn. That sense of letting go and the grief that goes with that. The meek who don't have their egos out as a spear point meeting the world and asserting itself and demanding constant attention. And it goes on.

It goes on. That somehow what we are introducing Christie and Colin to today, at different points along the path, is a path in which we are to become but which recognizes that this becoming is also—it's not in a vacuum. It's not in the purity of Kingdom of God context. That it's in a context which is going to bring with it wound and baggage and all of the stuff that comes along with life. There's almost a bittersweet welcome here. Welcome to the fray!

We have before us all a path of letting go as part of that becoming. Letting go of those things which stand between us and the image of God. Letting go of the baggage that holds us down, that keeps us weighted, that keeps us cut off from the Kingdom, that keeps us cut off from one another.

When Jesus spoke to the people on this hillside, he was welcoming them into a path that included the reality of life. It wasn't this gauzy, Hallmark card depiction of life, it was the reality of life. And he calls us into engaging and embracing that so that whatever life may throw at us, we don't just try to avoid it but we embrace it. And we let it become part of becoming this becoming fully human, fully who we are. Not carrying as baggage, not wearing it only as scar tissue, but letting it as well help form us into that person that God created us to be.

(Baby noise from the congregation.) I love that sound! (Chuckle) That sound is a sign of life, of new life and it's there for all of us, inside us all, the tiniest to the most ancient of days, all have within us that same child of God infant that is always becoming.