

A scenic landscape photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a calm lake reflects the surrounding mountains and sky. The middle ground shows steep, rocky slopes covered in dense evergreen forests. In the background, majestic mountains with patches of snow rise against a clear, light blue sky. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and majestic.

Following Jesus in the Way Toward God's Dreams and Hopes

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The Collect

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON

In our baptism, we have entered the family of God and have become beloved Children of God. In Baptism, we accept what God has already given to us. God does the work, and we can stand in the certainty that we are beloved children of God, because we already are through Christ, who redeems us.

First Peter is written to the Christian diaspora, a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christians around the Roman provinces of modern-day Turkey. Many people had no nation or clan before joining the movement, which the early church provided them with. The reading for today is talking about the newly baptised in the Early Church. From early Christian writing, we have learned about the Early Church baptismal practices. It was a two- to three-year preparation process that ended on Easter with the newly baptised's first Eucharistic meal. Critical to their baptismal practice was the understanding that this newly developed faith required a behaviour change. They could not continue living as they had been. Receiving the Grace of Jesus changes us.

Sometimes, we can get caught up in the lie that we have to be “good enough,” that we have to be “perfect Christians.” Sometimes, I forget that I am justified by faith alone, that I don’t have to “rush headlong into despair”¹ to be “perfect enough” to deserve God’s grace.

In baptism, we are washed by water and joined to Christ’s death and resurrection. We die to the sinful inclinations to focus inward on our own desires. We are released from the evil powers of this world, which tear down, destroy, and drive us apart. We are freed from the inner accuser and the lies of the mind that draw us from the love of God.² Reborn in baptism, we can turn to Jesus as our advocate and friend, put our whole trust in God’s expansive grace, unconditional love, and unrestricted redemption. In baptism, Jesus invites us to walk with him in the way toward God’s dreams and hopes.³

Luther says, “Let all Christians regard their baptism as the daily garment that they are to wear all the time.” Baptism is not a one-and-done event; it is a daily reality. It is the garment of resurrection we wear as members of God’s family—a daily dying to self and rising into the life and love of God.

Former Archbishop Rowan Williams said, “The baptised life is a life that gives us the resource and strength to ask awkward but necessary questions of one another and of our world. It is a life that looks towards reconciliation, building bridges, repairing shattered relationships. It is a life that looks towards justice and liberty, the liberty to

¹ Book of Concord: Apology of the Augsburg Confession: Article IV: Justification, paragraph 20

² COTA Baptism Liturgy from 8-Dec 2013

³ “Commentary on John 14.”

work together to make human life in society some kind of reflection of the wisdom and order and justice of God.”⁴

Our baptism into the family of God does ask something of us. We are invited to continue Jesus' work of bringing the Kingdom of Christ to earth. What gifts has God given you to help our world better reflect the wisdom, order, and justice of God?

Today, as we celebrate the sacrament of Baptism, we also remember our own. We remember that before we did anything right or wrong, before we proved ourselves worthy or failed again, God named us *Beloved*. Baptism is not something we leave behind in the past, but a promise we imperfectly live into each day—a promise that God is at work in us and through us.

Clothed in our baptism, we are sent into the world God loves. Sent to (Luke 4) to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and set free those who are oppressed. Grounded in the unearned grace that God freely gives, we can proclaim God's mercy, justice, and reconciling love that the world so desperately needs to hear.

Prayers of the People

With the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation.

⁴ Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer, page 13

We pray, holy God, for the church universal – for the unity of the church. We pray for the LCIGB, Bishop Paulina, Pastor Joseph, and all clergy who serve in your spirit. O God, our Sanctuary, empower the church, and in your mercy, hear our prayers.

We pray, omnipotent God, for the well-being of creation – for the will and wisdom to care for the earth, we praise you for the blessing of the sun and the rain, for bird songs in the morning. May the awaking of spring and summer revive us. O God, Rainbow of promise, preserve the earth, and in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray, righteous God, for peace and justice in the world – and for the upcoming election this week. Be with all the candidates, and may they do the work of your justice in our communities. We pray for efforts towards international cooperation and for peace in Gaza, Ukraine, Iran, Sudan, Myanmar, and for all who feel unsafe in their countries. We pray over the attack in Golders Green; may your justice be done so that our Jewish neighbours may feel safe. We pray for the end of interfaith violence. O God, Sovereign and Judge, guide the nations, and in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray, benevolent God, for the poor, oppressed, sick, bereaved, lonely – for the hungry and the homeless, for persons without family or friends. O God, Shepherd and Mother, protect the needy, and in your mercy, hear our prayers.

We pray, compassionate God, for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit – for those in hospitals and other institutions of care, for those who are incarcerated, for those who are sick, for all who today will die – O God, Healer and Nurse, heal the sick, and in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray, faithful God, for this congregation – for deeper faith and stronger commitment for us all, for homebound members. O God, Everlasting Arms, embrace this assembly, and in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray, loving God, for the desires of our hearts ---

O God, our Heart's Desire, grant us peace, and in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Receive our thanksgiving, eternal God, for all who have died in the faith – that at the end we will join with them to rejoice in your presence, O God, our Homeland, gather us to yourself, and in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Our Savior and Lord. AMEN.