

**The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith**

**Holy Comforter**

**Richmond, VA**

**July 3, 2016; the 7th Sunday after Pentecost**

**Readings: 2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30; Galatians 6:7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20.**

### **God Breaks In**

Today we gather in community to be the people through  
whom God breaks into the world in a particular way.

We call this being the Church.

We do this all the time...when we are here in church on a  
Sunday, in prayer and worship, and also in our  
outreach efforts such as the Food Pantry and the  
Veterans' Meal ministry...and in many other  
ways when we gather.

God's love breaks in and transforms... does it feel like  
a "breaking in," like God showing up in the middle of  
an unlikely and somewhat hostile environment  
given the situation in our world today?

I think it does in some ways, and always has when God's  
grace and love become known in the world.

Jesus was born into a world that was not that welcoming  
of his light.

Jesus was rose again in a world that was not expecting  
the kingdom of God to come so near, in such a way.

God's love is breaking in, overflowing, in our gathering of  
hope and faith and in what we will do today.

We will baptized George Elliott Marshall; George will be  
baptized and in that action he is reborn, he is made  
a citizen of God's reign; a member of the Body of  
Christ; a minister of the Church!

Every baptized person is officially a minister of the  
Church; and as such a young person, George  
ministers to us with his smile and his love so

freely given.

Baptism is God's love breaking in with hope for the future...as the prophet Jeremiah recorded:

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,  
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a  
future with hope.

George's baptism is a great gift to all of us today  
as it reminds of God's promises to all of us  
and for our world.

Nothing can separate us from Christ, who is our light.

The light of Christ breaks into our world that continues to  
be a very difficult place to live for many.

Who can come here today without being aware of all the  
sad things happening here at home and around the  
world?

George's baptism and our celebration of God with us, in  
baptism and in our communion with Christ in the  
sacrament of bread and wine, all this happens in  
a world that is so often rocked by violence.

I'm deeply aware that since I last preached, we have seen  
so much bloodshed; we have cried for those lost in  
Orlando, Istanbul, just yesterday waking up to  
more terror and lives lost in Dhaka  
Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup>

...as well as others lost violence in many places for  
different reasons.

This is the reality in which we live.

But there is another reality.

And it is important to realize that we do not come here to  
escape the violence of the world, but to ground  
ourselves in God's love and in the strength of God and of  
this community, so that we are able to better  
address, to deal with, the problems of

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<sup>1</sup> Since this sermon was given, we also grieve the loss of over 140 persons in Baghdad killed by ISIS.

life, the tragedies of life.

We have gathered here today to celebrate the greater reality, greater power, and to proclaim that God's kingdom has come near.

George is being baptised into this greater reality; he will be marked as Christ's own forever.

George, like us, will never have to face the challenges of this life on his own; even in the midst of the world's troubles, he is raised to a new life in Christ.

This new life in Christ is what we as Christians share.

This new life in Christ, Christ living in us, enables us to go out and be for God in our world.

Before Jesus, in the time of Naaman, who we hear about in 2nd Kings...in our Hebrew scriptures, God is surprising people with unexpected grace.

Naamen was a powerful man, living in a place and time with rules and expectations...there was a way things worked, and a way things did not work.

To cure his leprosy, Naaman went to one in power for help...but that king has no idea what do and is angered to be asked.

It made sense to Naamen to seek help from someone in authority...that was how the world worked.

But instead, it is a servant girl who had the answer to Naaman's problems...she knew that Naaman should go to the prophet.

Naaman finally gets to Elisha, who tells the great soldier to go and wash in the Jordan and he will be healed.

But Naaman is angered ....

That seems too easy, too simple.

Shouldn't the prophet come and wave his hand over the spot and call upon God...and why the Jordan?

There are rivers in Damascus that are better...says Naaman.

And then the point is made, "If you had been asked to do something difficult, would you not have done it?"  
 In the end, Naaman does what the prophet told him to do, and he is healed.

God breaks in to Naaman's world, challenges his world view, and brings him to new life.

This is a lot like baptism.

Some may wonder, how could it be so easy, just be baptized and you are enabled to share in the life of God in a special way...what we call our life in Christ.

It is easy in one sense.

Baptism is open to anyone, everyone.

There are no requirements.

God's grace and love are available --- freely given.

Eternal life, salvation, not just about the future, life after death, but about living as a Christ follower now.

There are no prerequisite requirements, but there are vows.

Like marriage vows, our baptismal vows are about relationship and forming a bond, making a commitment.

Through baptism God makes promises to us....to always be with us...to bring us into the fellowship of the Church...to help us through everything...to rejoice with us in all that delights us throughout our lives, and when this life comes to an end, to welcome us into the next life, for in death life is changed, not ended.

In baptism, we make promises to God.

Today, George's parents and Godparents will make these promises from him, and when he is older, he will be able through confirmation to claim them publicly as his own.

Last week, Grant, in his sermon, discussed the difference between being a “fan” versus being a “follower” of Jesus.

From that sermon, we know we want to be followers, but that word “follower” in our culture often conveys something negative --- as in being a follower and not a leader -- but being a follower of God, of Christ...walking the Way of Jesus...is unlike being a follower in any other way.

Because in following Christ, we are affirmed and called to be the people, to be the person God has created you to be...to the fullest extent possible.

The Christian faith, while being a community experience, when it is being lived to the fullest, never discounts the individual...it is the exact opposite.

God needs you; God needs me; God needs George, to be about the mission of God in the world.

You are the only one who can be for God in the world the way you can...because of who you are, because of the people you know, and the situations in which you find yourself.

The harvest is plentiful ---there is much for us to be about for God.

Our baptismal vows, which we will all renew in few moments, give us structure, clues, to what that mission involves, but then God leaves it to us to workout the details.

Each Christian’s life is about working out the details of how to seek and serve Christ in all persons, how to respect the dignity of every human being...how to be about peace and justice in the world.

Today, George’s life as a Christian begins, he has always been God’s beloved, but today he becomes part of the Christian mission...part of God’s plan for him as member of the Body of Christ.

It is exciting.

The possibilities are many.

And for the rest of us, today we reaffirm our vows to God;  
this can be a new beginning for us today, which is  
exciting.

Everyday is a new day, God's new creation, a chance to  
do something beautiful for God. Amen.