



SAINT MARK'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Baptism of Our LORD
St. Mark's, Little Rock, 1-7-18
Danny Schieffler

Ever since I grew my first vegetable garden
back in the days of law school
I'd been wanting to settle down
and plant some fruit trees--
especially peaches
July Elbertas to be specific.
because there's nothing quite like
the taste of Elbertas
in the summertime.
So when we moved back to Helena
and bought a house,
late that first winter
I placed my first order to Stark Brothers-
I wanted be ready
when the time came to plant them.
I didn't know much about fruit trees back then
but as I did my homework
I learned that the best fruit trees are usually grafted.
It seems that a good fruit tree
does not naturally have
a good root system.
And so the best fruit trees
are created when
one takes upper section of one variety
and grafts it onto a healthy root system
of another variety.
And that's exactly what Starks Brothers did
for the trees that I ordered.
Today on this traditional day for celebrating Jesus' baptism

We are also celebrating baptisms at St. Mark's.
And in doing so
we are going to give each one of these children
the very best root system there is
We are grafting them
into the body of Christ
Where Christ himself dwells
And through the church
will nurture them
And lead them to an abundant life
in which they will grow
and bear good fruit.
Sacramentally that starts today
with grafting
with planting
with baptism.
But it does not end there.
Just as a tree
must have light, food and water.
in order to thrive
So these children
And for that matter, we as adults
need certain things
to thrive.
When my trees arrived from Stark Brothers
they came with a little booklet
which explained exactly what the trees needed.
And though it was sometimes challenging
To follow the instructions
to take care of the trees
in the heat of the summer.
I discovered
that if I followed the instructions in that little booklet
--and it was just a few pages long--
the trees would actually grow.
In a similar way
at baptism
God gives us instructions
on what we need.

And amazingly
its even shorter than the little booklet from Stark Brothers
We call it our baptismal covenant
And through this covenant
through our relationship with God
God shows us how to find nourishment for ourselves
and for others
and thus grow.

One part of our covenant says
We will continue in the apostles' teaching
Which means in essence continuing in Jesus' teaching
going all the way back to the apostles.

Lately, I've been reading about Sabbath teachings
And how important it was to Jesus
to take time to rest and worship each week.
Just as a tree needs periods of dormancy each season
To bear fruit
So we need Sabbath dormancy
Each week to truly be alive.

Our covenant also emphasizes
our fellowship or relationship with others
especially people of faith
so that our own faith
can be nourished in community

Contrary to American myth of the rugged individual
There is no such thing
as an individual Christian.

Another part of the covenant emphasizes prayer.
Just as much as God gives us air to breathe
Through prayer
God gives us
the ability to breathe in
God's Spirit.

Many times
I have seen trees and plants wilt without water.
But after a good drink of water
they perk up good as good new.
Prayer will do that too for all of us
And it's God's gift to all of us.

The third section of the covenant
 (I'll come back to the second in a moment)
 talks about proclaiming the good news of Christ
Picasso once said
 "The meaning of life is to find your gift.
 The purpose of life is to give it away."
 this is essence is our covenant with God as well.
To finally realize how much God loves you
 changes everything about your life
 and then to give that love away to others
 changes the world.
Our covenant goes on
 we are to seek and serve Christ in all persons.
Last week in Bible study
 once person said he is learning to have
 to have sympathy for others
 instead of judgment.
 Not an easy thing to do
 in this world.
But God promises to give us grace and compassion
 to help us
 to do just that.
 to love others
 not to judge them.
And near the end of our covenant with God
 God calls us and in response
 We promise to strive for justice and peace
 And recognize the dignity of every human being.
 Again not easy thing to do in this world
 Especially when we and so many in the world
 behave with less than our God given dignity
But when that happens
 When We will fall short
 When we fail to keep our covenant
There is one more thing in our covenant to help us
 And one more thing that I learned from fruit trees
And that is the lesson of pruning.
 For unless a fruit tree
 is pruned from time to time
 it will begin to grow too many branches

and unproductive branches.
 And sometimes these branches can be quite deceptive
 Some of the branches may even look good for a while
 But unless they are trimmed and in some cases
 completely cut off
 the tree will not produce fruit nearly as well
 Now I had never thought of pruning knife
 as being a gift
 any more than I had thought about repenting
 and returning to the LORD
 as begin a gift from God
 But I do now.
 For after two years of pruning
 And three years of growing.
 I had nearly a bushel
 Of some the best tasting Elbertas
 I've ever put in my mouth.
 At first it nearly killed me
 To have prune those branches
 But it was the right to do
 In the same way
 As challenging as it may sound
 Repentance
 Making changes in our lives
 Rededicating our lives to God
 At the beginning of a new year
 Whether that be pruning some unhealthy habit
 Or taking on something good for our lives
 Like Sabbath rest
 Remembering, resting and renewing our lives in Christ
 Repentance is God's gift to us
 And because it is God's gift
 It is never too late
 For in Christ
 God gives us a root that never fails
 And through Christ
 Newness of life And renewal
 are always possible
 And so is a bumper crop
 A full basket of life!