

Christ Church, Georgetown
The Third Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, June 25, 2017
The Rev. Timothy Cole
Genesis 21:8-21, Matthew 10:24-39

When I was a boy I always knew I was in trouble if I heard my mother shout my full name, "Timothy!" If it was "Tim," all was well, but "Timothy!" meant I had committed some heinous crime or other. The ultimate phrase was, "Timothy, you offend me!" But that was usually reserved for those rare occasions where I really had "let the side down."

Names are important. We name our children, and the names we give them do, in a sense, frame who they are. I don't think many people choose names because of what they mean. For Lorraine and me I think we thought more about other names in the family, and whom the child might be named after, and just if we liked the name or not. Only after we had settled on Emily for my daughter's name did I discover that it meant "industrious," or "striving." But, you know, she has anyway pretty much always lived up to that name.

Some names are a real challenge to live up to. Timothy, for instance, comes from the Greek "Timo – theos" which means "he who honors God." Well, that is something to aspire to for sure. On top of that, I think my Father also had St. Paul in mind who calls Timothy "my own son in the faith."

Well, this morning, here in this beautiful garden, we now name before God and make Christians of two tiny people, Eleanora and Mary Elizabeth. Eleanora means "light," which I am sure she is and will always be to Matthew and Olivia and her family. During the service we will give both her and Mary Elizabeth a light: A candle lit from the Easter or Paschal Candle which represents the light of the risen Christ in the world. And we all pray that both these children will indeed "Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God."

We are in fact lighting a new light in Eleanora and Mary Elizabeth's hearts today. If that light is nurtured, first by us, and then by them, it is a light that will burn brighter and brighter throughout their lives and on, at last, into Christ's eternal kingdom.

Mary is a little less certain in meaning because it is a very, very ancient name indeed. It probably comes originally from the Egyptian language meaning "beloved" or simply "love." Elizabeth is easier. It comes from the Greek meaning "oath of God" – God's sworn purpose.

Well, I am sure she will be a focus and catalyst for love for Hadley and Bradley and all her family, as Eleanora will be to hers. But the meaning of Elizabeth -- "The oath of God" -- is also profoundly true for both children today. We will shortly hear their parents and godparents promising to bring these children up in the Christian faith. They are committing themselves to teach each child to pray, to know God, and to be part of the life of the church. These are solemn promises. And, as all Christian parents know, on some Sunday mornings at the end of a long week, they are promises that require a good deal of work and sacrifice to keep.

And yet the bigger promise or oath that is made here today is actually, as the name Elizabeth says, not our oaths but God's oath to these two children and to every one of those of us who are baptized. He does not promise that nothing bad will happen to them. He could not do that even for his own son. But he does promise that, from this day forward, they may rely absolutely on

him to get them through whatever they have to face in life. The world can do terrible things to us but it can never touch that part of us that he holds forever in his hand by baptism, if we let him. As St. Paul says, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God," nothing that life can do, not even death. So that is Elizabeth – God's oath to us all. And it means that we are, at the most fundamental level, indestructible people.

Of all the things that happen in life, I think becoming a parent, probably had a bigger impact on me and my faith than anything else. It changed the way I looked at things. Before, the struggles and challenges of work and people, success and failure were the biggest things in my life. But once the children came along I noticed a big change. Suddenly I would look at them and think as long as they are well, and fed, and happy, then really all the rest of the things that fill my life - the conflicts and the challenges – well. they just do not matter nearly so much.

Also it made me think about God differently. I suddenly realized that if God loves me at least as much as I love my children, then there really is hope for me. Because, I know that there is much that they could do that would grieve my heart, but there is nothing that they could do that would stop me loving them and wanting the best for them. Just think, God looks at you just as you look at your children, but only much more so because he is much more than we are. We can grieve his heart, but we can never stop him loving us.

Today's Gospel is a hard one for a baptism. It speaks of Jesus bringing not peace, but a sword that will set son against Father and daughter against Mother. Hard, but apposite because we know that what we do here today is of great importance: A matter of life and death in fact. God is making an oath to these children today, but the promise that we make on their behalf is a big promise. It is their promise of themselves that they will grow up prepared to take up the cross and follow him.

Three things, then, make up our joy today. First, God's purpose, his oath to Eleanora, Mary Elizabeth, and each of us is declared in these simple things of water and oil and light. We are here for a reason and that reason is in God's mind and heart and for each of us to discover in this amazing quest we call life.

Second, God's challenge is set before them and us, that we may live a worthwhile and a Christian life: That they and we might take up the cross and discover, to our great and permanent surprise, that when we give our lives away we find them.

And finally, God promises these, his newest children, and us, relationship. Whatever happens in their lives they have his ear, his hand, and his heart as long as they want them, reach for them, and follow him.