

Scripture Text: Romans 8:1-17a

Two years ago, almost to the day, I preached here when Ryan was supposed to have gone out of town. I don't know if she remembers it, but June Doney said I could preach here any time. So I figured, if *June Doney* said I could . . . well, who's going to argue with that? I also figured I wrote at least half of last week's sermon, so . . . what's one more half? So here I am.

I realize last week's sermon had a lot to do with Isaac. Well, let's face it, truth be told I consider last week to be Isaac's first preaching engagement. I'm going to ask your indulgence again, as this week we talk about Ruth and use her as our illustration. Now I think, to be fair, next week Ryan will have to talk about Hannah. We don't want to leave her out.

So, what just happened there? Over there. With the water. And the cute baby. What happened? I can tell you what didn't happen. We didn't just save that baby from eternal damnation by pouring water over her head using the Trinitarian formula. We didn't. In fact, with regard to the state of Ruth's soul, we didn't do much of anything. Yeah, Ryan spilled some water. But God is the one who holds the fate of Ruth's soul in his hands. And it is God who really did something here. It's God who marked Ruth in a way that goes far beyond her wet head and wet—dry clean only—dress.

It is not ours to decide who is ultimately saved and going to heaven and who is not. That is God's business and his alone. But the reality is that all of us. *All* of us. All of us have been created to bring glory to God. And *all* of us have been created to confess Jesus Christ as Lord. And I wouldn't be a Christian preacher if I didn't implore you to do so today. Not because you want to get something out of it, like your ticket to heaven, but simply because it's true. As for the ticket to heaven, let's leave the future to the one who wrote it. Our resurrection story is not just about one day—the day

Jesus came back from the dead—and it's not just about eternity and where we'll spend it. It is about every minute of every day for every person.

All people have been created by God to his Glory. But there is something special about the baptized. We are claiming something monumental here: that God has provided us a sign of all he's done for us and in our baptism he has sealed us as his own.

In our baptism we receive our defining identity. Beyond her name, Ruth, among many Ruths. Even more than a Ruth Ann among two Ruth Ann's in our church and how ever many more there are out there. Far beyond even being a Kraus. Our Ruth Ann's primary identity is as one of God's baptized children.

For the last few weeks, Isaac has been quite excited about a book he was read at school. It's a wonderful story entitled *Purple, Green, and Yellow*, by Robert Munsch. In it a little girl has an adventure—and mishap—with permanent markers. The one phrase that has stuck with Isaac, which he has repeated . . . well . . . repeatedly for at least a week is the phrase used to describe markers that are declared *The Best*, by the little girl just learning to use markers. She calls these permanent markers “super-indelible-never-come-off-till-you're-dead-and-maybe-even-later colouring markers.” A mouthful, I know. But Thursday morning, after a week or so of hearing it, I got to thinking about this phrase at the same time I was pondering Ruth's Baptism. And something clicked for me. (Now, this is what you get when you let a Stay-At-Home Mom preach.) Baptism is like those markers.

In our house we call permanent markers the “special markers” because we only use them once in a great while under direct supervision. We handle them with special care. Before someone under 4 ½ feet tall uses one, he must make a case, present an argument for why these special markers must be used RIGHT NOW and for what

purpose. Why? Why such a big deal made of it? Because, permanent markers *are* “super-indelible-never-come-off-till-you’re-dead-and-maybe-even-later colouring markers.” And for a mom, that’s pretty scary.

Likewise, what we did today is also scary. Baptism is actually even scarier, because it too is “super-indelible,” and beyond. Baptism never comes off till your dead and most certainly later. It never comes off. Period. We have witnessed a mighty act here with Ruth. An act of God's love and grace that will endure.

We've established that Ruth hasn't been saved by this act. Her salvation is determined by God, not by us. We leave that question with God; and and we live life assuming she is among God's elect, trusting in God's sovereignty, and helping her to live into and live out the gift of faith she's been given. We have all promised. You all have promised, to help her do that. And I'm going to hold you to that! When Hannah was baptized here, we had just recently arrived and we were all only signed on for a three-year gig. Well, you all just agreed to keep us, and we, Lord willing and desiring, plan on being here for a while. You just made a long-term commitment here!

As we have witnessed Ruth's baptism we are called to remember our own baptism. We are called to remember how we who have been baptized, in any context, whether as unknowing infants or believing adults, also have been indelibly marked. We are called to remember how each of us needs to live into that mark, live out that faith. Scary stuff. You can run, but you can't hide from the claim God has already made on your life. Scary stuff.

Our baptism marks us as God's own. Even if we are baptized as babies, we are marked and we are held to it. We are to live into that baptism; we must live into being the person God has named and claimed and intended us to be. You can't run away from your baptism, it is always there. The super-indelible-never-come-off-until-you're-

dead-and-not-even-then seal upon your very being. And should we try to forget, we will not find rest, we will not find peace.

How do we live out that faith? How indeed in the face of death and destruction all around us? We have great tragedies to deal with, struggles to live with, lists of questions that just grow longer and longer with each passing year. We stand now in an in-between time. Assured of God's victory over death, but awaiting the final act when everything is set aright. How do we deal with this? How do we walk through this life in the face of tragedy, in the face of personal temptation? How oh how do we make it from our mess to God's promised Glory?

Well one thing I do know is we don't do it alone. As baptized children of God, we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Before his ascension, Jesus promised his disciples he'd send an advocate, a counselor to work on our behalf. God's Holy Spirit remains with us. As our own personal lawyer. We have this advocate, this counselor, this lawyer, to stand by our side, helping us negotiate the sticky places, advising us before we make a stupid move, helping us out of the consequences when we do make a stupid move. God himself, his Spirit, with us, moving us, guiding us.

The Good News of the Gospel is that for those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation. God has fulfilled the law, the whole giant checklist that we skim through when we're reading Leviticus—well, maybe that's just me. In Christ, the law was fulfilled, we are freed from having to toe the line, mark off the boxes, making sure all our ducks are in a row so we can get to the right place.

We have been set free from all the checklists, we have been given the gift of One who guides us in the right way. Not so we can do right by God and get to heaven. Not so we can be worthy of what he has already done for us—there are not enough rules we could follow to ever do that.

We follow the right way, we live according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, because it's who we are by virtue of Whose we are. If we ignore that Holy Spirit, seeking the ways of the flesh, the ways our body takes us or the way the world would have us go, we will never be truly comfortable. It's like having your shoes on the wrong feet. Will you get where you're going? Sure, but it will never feel quite right. Our lives will never feel peace-filled. There will always be unrest. We will never feel truly at home, for this world, this not-yet world, is not our home. To try to live by its rules leads at best to unrest. At worst, simply to death. But to live guided by God's Holy Spirit, to live as God intends, living in response to that indelible mark of baptism, is life and peace.

When the task seems overwhelming. When doing the right thing seems too hard. Stop. And remember. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you." The Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. . . . We cry out to God not as slaves to a master asking for mercy, crouched and fearful, knowing we can never measure up. No, we cry out to God as children. Calling to our Daddy for help. Daddy, we want better. We want more out of this life. We want your resurrection, here today. We want peace. We want wholeness. We want holy-ness. We want to live as your heirs. Joint heirs with Christ, who reigns in Glory with you. One God, forever and ever. Amen.