

**Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood**

**March 28, 2010**

**God's Enduring Love  
(Baptism of Zean Seguerra)**

**Ps 118:1-2 & 19-29 & Matthew 3:13-17  
Hymns – 78, 521, 706, 698**

There is a powerful flow of flourishing life  
that has come to my attention  
over these past few months  
as we have been searched by the Psalms.  
This flow of flourishing life is complex,  
yet profoundly simple at the same time.

Here it is as I currently understand it.

God loves us and changes us  
so we and others can flourish.

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The Scriptures use a wide variety of words  
to point to the nature and impact of God's love,  
but the most powerful  
have to do with it's enduring, steadfast, constant qualities.  
This is love that holds us tenderly and mercifully  
no matter what happens.  
This is love that pursues us when we wander.  
This is love that remains with us  
even if we ignore it.  
This is love that provides everything we ever desired  
from a parent, sibling, spouse, or friend,  
and then provides infinitely more.  
Words cannot adequately describe this love,  
so it came to us in a person,  
in the flesh,  
full of the grace and truth of this love,  
to live with us, die for us,  
and triumph over death to free us from all fear.  
This is the love that casts our fear  
so we can truly flourish.  
(1 John 4:16b-19)

In Zean's baptism this morning,  
we made the sign of the cross on Zean's forehead three times,  
in the name of the Holy Trinity,  
to acknowledge the work  
of the creating Father, the redeeming Son,  
and the sustaining Spirit  
in this sacrament.

This is a visible sign and seal  
of God's invisible presence and grace.  
It assures us of the washing away of our sins,  
the start of a new life for us in Christ,  
and the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us flourish.

As parents, godparents, and congregation,  
we all take vows to help raise Zean in a flourishing faith,  
in a community that knows and celebrates  
the incomparable love of Jesus Christ.

It's the kind of faith  
the author of Psalm 118  
and the community that kept using it in worship  
knew deep in their beings.  
It's faith in a loving God who changes us  
so we and others can flourish.

This Psalm was sung as people entered the temple,  
the space of worship  
in which they remembered their connection  
with the Divine love.  
They praised God as love.  
They remembered past acts of responsive love and rejoiced.  
God gave life and light,  
and the people cried out for joy,  
blew trumpets in celebration,  
and waved palm branches in delight.

However little we Presbyterians may show this kind of joy outwardly,  
I know we feel it inwardly.  
I see it on the faces,  
with the smiles that spread over them  
when we remember how good God has been to us,  
how close God is to us,  
and how steadfastly God will continue to love us for all eternity.

This is the promise that God sealed for us in Jesus Christ.  
With Jesus, we are God's beloved children and friends.  
In Christ, we are forgiven and free to flourish.  
God *is* pleased with us and sends us out to be faithful.  
We will be tempted and tested  
in the wildernesses of our modern world,  
invited to follow other gods  
who promise great treasures of all kinds.  
But true flourishing  
comes from living in and faithfully serving Jesus Christ.

In the vows we all took this morning,  
Jennifer and Harmond promised to be disciples of Jesus Christ  
and model the gifts of the Spirit  
so that Zean will have a rich Christian upbringing.  
The godparents promised to do the same.  
And we, the whole congregation,  
on behalf of the whole church,  
promised to do the same as well.

We've all taken on serious responsibilities here.  
To fulfill those vows faithfully,  
we will have to rely on God's enduring love,  
on the love that gives us resilience, patience, and persistence  
in living out those vows for Zean's sake.  
We will have to model and be diligent about teaching  
those gifts of the Spirit we've remembered so often –  
love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline.  
This is the kind of community we have promised  
to maintain and enhance for Zean's growth in Christ.  
And in nurturing his growth in the faith, we will realize our own.

People don't go to church much these days.  
It takes a strong faith and a deep gratitude  
to develop and enjoy the discipline  
of gathering with fellow Christians  
to remember God's love and give thanks.  
But this experience of God's love is so deeply satisfying,  
so richly rewarding,  
so smile inducing and joy generating,  
that we find it hard not to invite others to enjoy it,  
hard not to nurture our children and godchildren in it.

They are free to respond as they see fit.  
We do not have the power to coerce them,  
much as we would like to at times.  
We do have the power to continue to invite them  
to enjoy with us the gifts of the Spirit  
and the flourishing life that flows  
from being constantly fed and nourished in them week after week  
in the company of others Christians.

It's up to the Holy Spirit to make our invitations work.  
It's up to us to keep extending them  
and then deliver on them when people come through the doors.

Here's the challenge to consider this week.

When people walk through the doors of Brentwood Presbyterian Church,  
will they encounter a community filled with joy because God loves them?  
Will they encounter the welcome of that loving God?  
Will they find a space where they can flourish in the love of God?  
Will they find worship, learning, fellowship, and service  
that encourages their growth in the faith?

I think they will  
and I think we can do it better.

That's what we have promised Zean this morning.  
Let's deliver together on those promises.

Amen