

The Sunday after All Saints—Year A  
Revelation 7:9-17  
Psalm 34:1-10, 22  
I John 3:1-3  
Matthew 5:1-12

What a day! What a glorious day! We are gathering together today, as a community, to baptize 5 children—Roxanne, Claire, Jay, Katie, and Naomi. They, and their parents and godparents, have been yearning for this day, leaning toward this day for some time now. *And*, it's the Sunday when we mark the feast of **All Saints**, and that lifts our eyes to a much, much bigger horizon—reminding us that what we do today spans the realms of time and space and eternity.

So, let's clear up some not good theology right from the start. Are we making these 5 individuals children of God today? (*pause*) NO! They are already that. Roxanne, Claire, Jay, Katie, and Naomi are *already* children of God by virtue of the fact that **God created them in God's very own image and God breathed God's own divine breath into them that gave them their life and their being**. God's had them from the beginning of their days. That grace has been stirring in them always. So, we are not making them children of God today, but we are *celebrating and marking something that already is*, and that is no small thing.

We human beings need **tangible, outward and visible signs**—the church word for that is *sacrament*—we need these **tangible, outward and visible signs to mark these deep spiritual truths and to make them real for us in ways that we can access and remember and return to and spring from**, again and again and again.

Today, we will **mark** Roxanne and Claire and Jay and Katie and Naomi **as Christ's own forever**. They will be **marked with the sign of the cross, reminding them that death and resurrection, loss and new beginning, is the paschal two-step they will dance all their lives long**. They will be **sealed by the Holy Spirit reminding them that the power and wisdom of God swirls around them and within them prompting them always with imagination and creativity and passion and fire**. Water will **flow over them reminding them that they are a part of the great flow of divine love that is always flowing**.

Today, we declare that **this bond established in baptism is indissoluble**. That is one of my favorite words in the whole *Book of Common Prayer*. You know what that means? (*pause*) **It can't be undone**. No matter what happens, no matter where your journey takes you, no matter your choices, good or bad, **this relationship with Christ, this relationship with God is solid. This bond won't dissolve, and it won't break**. When everything falls apart, and it will, you will always have this love holding you, for all of eternity. You can't do anything to make God love you more, and you can't do anything to make God love you less, because this love isn't a reward; it's not a prize to be earned through your A+ effort; it's not conditional; it's actually not even about us—**it's about accepting how much you are already loved; it's about drinking in that love and breathing out that love in all your words and deeds and actions. It's about knowing that Love that loved you first**.

And today isn't just about a little private thing going on between you and God, but it's about **knitting you into the fabric of this community, the Body of Christ, that stretches across the world and across the realms**. We prayed it at the beginning of this service—**“You have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord”**—and then we pray for **“the grace to so follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may**

come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you.” As we do this thing called life, *we are never alone*. We have **this community, here, in this realm**, and we have **this vast communion of saints praying for us and cheering us on and encouraging us from beyond**. We are all a part of **this great, mystical body**—this isn’t just an image; **this is an objective reality that blows our little rational minds**.

And when everything goes south, *this is everything*. Ask Pete and Yvonne about the power of this community this week as their hearts break with grief over the death of their son. They have both told me that your prayers and the prayers of their church communities in Charleston are blanketing them and sustaining them and giving them the courage to take the next breath and the next step.

But it’s bigger than that. As wrenching as this loss is, Pete and Yvonne are also remembering that their beloved son, *Jesse*, was also marked as Christ’s own forever, and that *Jesse is now among those robed in white who have come through the great ordeal that Revelation speaks of. Jesse understands, in a way that we do not yet understand, that salvation, wholeness, complete wholeness, belongs to God and to the Lamb, and Jesse has been washed in the blood of this Lamb, and the blood of the Lamb is just another way of talking about the force and power and flow of Jesus’ lifeforce that has gone to hell and back and has swallowed up death itself. Jesse has been washed in that blood, and he is radiant standing around that throne in the fullness of grace and glory and wholeness that now is his*. Listen to what the Revelation tells us: “For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. *They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*”

Baptism doesn’t mean that hard stuff won’t come your way; it’s not a get-out-of-life-painfree-card. Such a sugarcoated belief would do us no good in this life. No, life is life—it is full of joy, and it is full of sorrow. *Baptism is the promise that you are held in the love of God and the love of the Body of Christ made real in our flesh and blood, forever, no matter what, always, and nothing, nothing can separate you from that love, ever.*

Roxanne, Claire, Jay, Katie, and Naomi, *the rest of your days will be spent figuring out what it means to live in that love. The rest of your life will be spent learning how to steward that love. The five baptismal vows will guide your steps. You will make mistakes, and you will have to repent and return to the Lord and begin again. Seeking and serving Christ, loving your neighbor as yourself, striving for justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being, proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ, persevering against evil, repenting, returning, staying in communion and fellowship, continuing to grow, staying in conversation with God*—these are hard things to do. And yet, this is *how we follow Jesus and come to the wholeness that God longs for us to have and that all those saints worshiping night and day now enjoy*.

So, Roxanne, Claire, Jay, Katie, and Naomi—**welcome to this household of God and to this way of life that will sustain you when the ordeals come and that will envelop you in love beyond your imagining**. Today, you are marked as Christ’s own forever, sealed by the Holy Spirit, immersed in the flow of God’s love that is pouring over you—*God’s got you for eternity, and so do we*. Amen.

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