

First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
Sunday, August 26, 2007
Sermon by Huw Christopher, Pastor

Scripture Readings: Psalm 71:1-6
Jeremiah 1:4-10

Sermon Title: “Becoming the Children God Would Have Us To Be”

Sermon Text: Psalm 71:6: Upon you have I leaned from my birth: it was you who took me from my mother’s womb. My praise is continually of you.

Some of you may have been a little surprised, maybe dazzled, when you saw the stole I was wearing this morning. I chose to wear it today deliberately because of all that it means to me. It was made as a surprise for me at the Vacation Bible School program in 2001 at the Little Chapel on the Boardwalk in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina when I was pastor there. As I look at the names and some of the handprints I wonder what has become of these children and young people over the past six years. For some of them I was at the hospital when they were born. I had the privilege for many of them, as I had this morning for John and Elle, of baptizing them. Some of them whom I saw soon after they were born are now in High School. Others whose names are on the this stole are in College, and some even through College and married.

This morning as we have shared in the Sacrament of Baptism for John and for Elle we have remembered as we have sung that they are children of promise.

As I wonder what is becoming of the children whose names are on this stole I am sure that we wonder today how John and Elle will fulfil the promise and the potential which is within each one of them. I am sure that Ellie and Travis, Louise and Tim, as well as their grandparents and even great-grandparents have had many great thoughts about what these children might become. Some may even have their College already selected for them, and maybe even a chosen career. How much we wish today that their belly buttons were fast forward buttons and we could fast forward their lives, thirty or forty or even fifty years and see how they have fulfilled the promise and the potential that is within each one of them. While we cannot fast forward their lives in this way as we have shared in this Sacrament of Baptism for them we have given thanks to God for all of the promise and potential that God has given to each one of them, and indeed to all of us, in giving us the gift of life. As we have sung of the fact that they are children of promise we also have sung of the fact that first and foremost they are children of blessing. In the promises that Ellie and Travis, Louise and Tim and each one of us have made for John and for Elle this morning we have affirmed that it is our desire that they might come to know what it is to claim this blessing of God for their own lives as they come to know what it is to be the children of God. It was knowing that relationship with God as his rock and his fortress that enabled the psalmist to know the blessing and assurance that comes from knowing that there was One to whom he could cry out for support and strength in his times of trouble. This certainly is something we would also want to pray that John and Elle might come to know in all of the circumstances of their lives. It is of this relationship with him from his birth, and even before his birth, that God reminds Jeremiah as he encourages him to become the prophet God would have him to be, even though he himself may have felt too young, or too ill-prepared and inadequate for the task. Our anthem has reminded us that the God who has heard the boding cries of John and Elle, and of

each one of us, is the God who is with us and will be with us in life and in death. This is the God who is seeking for all of us to know that as the children of God we are children of blessing.

On one occasion some parents were getting very frustrated with their son and his apparent lack of motivation and interest in doing anything serious with his life. This is a frustration I am sure that many parents have known. In their frustration they enrolled him in a psychological testing program to determine his aptitudes and potential for the future. After almost three days of testing he received an evaluation form and a book with which to interpret the results. Giving his lack of motivation the book and the report were soon relegated to the attic of his parents' house.

Thirty years later, rummaging through his parents' attic he discovered the dust-covered book and test form. To his surprise as he looked at this report once again he found that he had ended up doing exactly what the tests had projected. The man who told this story about his own experience is now a retired Methodist minister. Reflecting on his own experience he said, "Sometimes we forget or don't recognize that God has set goals for our lives. We may not recognize those goals or respond to God's call but from the moment of our creation, God has put within each of us the potential to be what God wants us to be. (*The Upper Room Disciplines 2004*, page 241) It was such an experience that God wanted Jeremiah to know as he assured him that he had prepared him to be a prophet to the nations even though he felt inadequate to the task.

How much we might wish that God would make his intentions as clear to John and Elle, and to all of us, as we seek to be the children God would have us to be. Even if the call to each of us from God may not come as clearly, how much we hope John and Elle, and indeed all of us, might be able to look at our lives and recognize that we have fulfilled that promise and potential of what it means to be

the children of blessing, blessed by God with unique gifts, talents and personalities to be used to become the people God would have us to be. John and Elle and all of us are children of God blessed by God. We are the children of God, the children of God's blessing whom God would want to use to be a blessing to other people. As we pray that John and Elle, and all of us, might live out that promise God has placed within each one of us let us affirm again what God would have us to be and to do as the children of God using the affirmation of faith printed in the bulletin. Let us stand and affirm our faith together...

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH *from Questions 1-4 of the Study Catechism
of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

Leader: What is God's purpose for your life?

**Unison: God wills that I should live by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
for the love of God, and in the communion of the Holy Spirit.**

Leader: How do you live by the grace of the
Lord Jesus Christ?

**Unison: I am not my own. I have been bought with a price. The Lord Jesus
Christ loved me and gave himself for me. I entrust myself
completely to his care, giving thanks each day for his wonderful
goodness.**

Leader: How do you live for the love of God?

**Unison: I love because God first loved me. God loves me in Christ with a
love that never ends. Amazed by grace, I no longer live for myself.
I live for the Lord who died and rose again, triumphant over
death, for my sake. Therefore, I take those around me to heart,
especially those in particular need, knowing that Christ died for
them no less than for me.**

Leader: How do you live in the communion of the Holy Spirit?

**Unison: By the Holy Spirit, I am made one with the Lord Jesus Christ. I
am baptized into Christ's body, the church, along with all others
who confess him by faith. As a member of this community, I trust
in God's Word, share in the Lord's Supper, and turn to God
constantly in prayer. As I grow in grace and knowledge, I am led
to do the good works that God intends for my life.**