

Homily, St. Andrew's
Christmas Day 2014
Titus 3:4-7

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Today is a day of fulfillment. Today God's promise that a Saviour would come to us has been fulfilled. And today God's love is fulfilled in little Soren's life as we baptize him in the family of God.

The fulfillment of God's promise of grace and love we celebrate today comes to us after weeks of waiting and preparing. The season of Advent that ended last night was a time of seeking and hoping... a time of clinging to a promise of light even as the darkness deepened. I tend to get rather impatient with waiting and yet I think the seeking and yearning, the doubt and disbelief, that comes with waiting and preparing can actually, and strangely, be more comfortable and safe than fulfillment. We live in a time of great uncertainty when the image of seeking a better, more fulfilled life, is more popular than finding it. The consumer system relies on unending, unfulfilled desire. Leaving our options open is more common than commitment. We live in a time when we speak more about the journey than the destination. I'm as guilty as any... I believe in the need for life-long learning, the need for doubt that opens up new possibilities and challenges the status quo, and the need for a spirit of continual seeking. I believe that when individuals or communities think they have arrived, when we think we have all the right answers, we can begin down a very dangerous road that can too easily lead to violence and abuse. And so I like the church seasons of searching and questioning... seasons like Advent. But today is not that. Today is a day of fulfillment and it seems to me that as such, it presents a good challenge to us. It is a challenge to set aside our doubt and our mistrust, to set aside our seeking and questioning and to find rest at the cradle-side of Jesus.

In one of my favourite books of spiritual wisdom titled "Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in our Busy Lives", pastor and counsellor Wayne Muller writes about "the relentless busyness of modern life," and reflects on the ancient practice of sabbath-keeping as [quote] "a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities and accomplishments." (6) Near the end of the book, in a chapter called "The Way of Enough," he writes of a woman he met at a retreat:

"... she had devoted her whole life to spiritual seeking." He recalls, "she had traveled to sacred sites, attended countless retreats and workshops, sought teachers and guides. It had, she confessed, been a time of much striving; it had been fruitful in some ways, yet she felt tired, weary. She was getting older. She wondered how much stamina she had left to continue her search."

"'You have been a seeker for so long,' [Muller] said. 'Why not become a finder?' at this stage in your life, what if you imagined you were ready to let go of seeking, and begin finding?" She remained silent for a time, a look of deep confusion on her face, her head slightly tilted, as if she were trying to hear a sound far away. Then, suddenly, a laugh exploded from deep in her belly. A finder! What a delight! How could she have never imagined it before? She had always

been so focused on the search, she had never taken time to rejoice in the blessing, the gift of finding.” (202)

I have long loved the seasons of our church year because of the way it which they guide us through a whole range of spirituality - through hoping and seeking, waiting and preparing, through joy and journey, fear and despair, betrayal and confusion, through death and new life. And so no matter how much I may doubt and question, I love that today, throughout the Christmas season and into Epiphany, we are encouraged to be ‘finders’, and to know the finding as a gift. As Muller concludes his story, “the time for seeking is over; the time for finding has begun.” (202) It is not always so, and it should not always be so, but it is so for this Christmas day when Jesus is born and God’s promise of salvation is fulfilled.

The hardest thing, I think, about laying aside seeking and choosing to be a finder is that God loves to surprise us such that what is found may not be what was expected. Back 2000 years ago, nobody expected the Messiah to come as a baby - little and vulnerable and wholly dependent on humanity to raise him. If the Creator of the Universe is going to break into the world, most sensible people would expect a great warrior, a strong leader, a spiritual giant. But God defies all expectation and chooses to come in poverty and simplicity, to average people in a small town. God chooses something more miraculous than a splendid, magnificent display and God chooses to challenge our ideas of what it means to find and to be found, to be holy and acceptable. The challenge of fulfilment today is whether we recognize God when He comes to us, for in our constant searching and uncertainty, we might miss the cry and call of a baby, lying in a manger.

Baby Soren will undoubtedly know much uncertainty in his life. It is uncertainty born largely of the gift of choice among the almost unlimited options and great abundance that we have. But while the many choices he will have are a great gift, they can also become a burden. The gift his parents and this community offers him today as he is presented for baptism, is that some questions are taken off the table... the questions of whether or not he is acceptable to God; whether or not he is loved; whether or not he is forgiven... these are the questions that are answered today - fully and irrevocably. Whatever Soren chooses as he grows up, whatever he does, he will not and cannot undo the great love bestowed upon him today. Soren remains free to journey, to question, to seek but because of today, he will also always belong as a full member of God’s family.

The gift of baptism is the gift of being found. As the letter to Titus reminds us this morning, “when God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” In baptism today, Soren is found by God, not because of what he will do in his life, but because of who he is as a beloved child of God. We rejoice today because God’s promise is fulfilled in Soren, as it has been in each of us, and so we have the freedom and the gift to become finders. May we find God today, humble and small, poor and vulnerable, and in the finding, may we know a little more of God’s peace, God’s love and God’s joy in our lives.