

Readings: Genesis 12: 1-4a; Romans 4: 1-5 & 13-17; John 3: 1-17

These words are addressed to Georgiana, our young baptism candidate this morning, but I hope they will resonate with the rest of us as well. It behoves each of us to revisit and recall who we are by baptism and whom, therefore, we serve. Indeed, in a few weeks' time, at Easter, we shall ourselves reaffirm the same promises being made this morning by Georgiana's parents and godparents.

Your baptismal day, Georgiana, has been well-chosen (whether by design or accident,) in terms of the appointed Bible readings. They are about two particular men, Abraham and Nicodemus, but they also tell us a great deal about ourselves and what it means to be a Christian, to be the people of God, brothers and sisters of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Today is the most important day of your Christian life, a new beginning. Everything else from now on dates from today, the day of your baptism.

Let's speak first of all of **Faith**. That word will be used several times when we come to your baptism. You might call it a Christian *keyword*. Faith is a free gift to us from God, not something of our own making. It is the 'stuff of life' for Christians. We live by it; we grow in it; we journey in it. We need it like plants need soil or travellers need roads. God gives us faith so we can trust in him and rely on him for ever to guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, give us absolutely everything we need. And he puts faith and trust in us. Even though we sometimes let him down he forgives us and lets us have another go, again and again.

One day, you will read about Abraham, a great man who lived about 4000 years ago. He lived his very long life as a journey of faith, trusting God in good times and in bad. Abraham made lots of mistakes, like we all do, but he was always drawn back to God and God put him back on track again. As the small person you are now, you trust your parents, and others they trust, to look after you. You naturally have faith that they want the best for you and will do all they can to bring you up to be the very best person you can be. Sometimes you might not like the way they do that because you won't understand, but later on you will. And it's like that for all of us with God. We don't always understand why things have to be the way they are, but we still need to trust, to keep faith with God, because however things seem to us at times, God is always good and keeps his promises. He wants the best for us. You are very fortunate, Georgiana, to have Christian parents who look to God our Father and try to imitate his big love. Almost certainly you will find faith hard at times, but never let that be a reason to let go of it. As someone once said, "*It's not doubt that is the opposite of faith, it is certainty.*" You might ponder those words later on in your life, and they might help you, as they have helped many others.

In today's gospel reading Jesus is having a conversation with a man called Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, who comes to see him after dark. He has seen some of Jesus's healing miracles and signs and he's intrigued to know more. He's not quite sure *how much* more he wants to know, but he's certainly curious. I am sure you can relate to that – children are naturally curious, and so they should be! I dare say many of us adults can remember asking questions when we were young and then being confused by the answers we were given. That's what happened to Nicodemus - Jesus didn't give him the answer he wanted or expected. He gave an answer that bewildered Nicodemus, partly because he used a word which could have two meanings. (You'll find Jesus does that sometimes!) He goes on to explain what is needed for Nicodemus to be his disciple, his follower:

*"I tell you", he says, "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the spirit."* (John 3:5). That's what's happening to you today, Georgiana. Jesus has called you to be his disciple, to be born again, not by going back in your mummy's tummy, but by being baptised in water and the Holy Spirit so that you are a member of his worldwide family as well as being a member of the Davison family.

It's a funny old family, the family of God. Sometimes you might get fed up with us. You might even find it bewildering being a Christian, but then again you may not. You might have friends who think it's a bit weird, going to church and stuff. You might sometimes feel that some other Christians are really not very nice because they seem judgemental or hypocritical or insensitive to others or talk about people behind their backs. You might wonder how they believe in a loving God when they say or do things that don't seem loving. Again, don't let that put you off, and don't be afraid to speak the truth, even if others disagree with you. Question things, of course, but be prepared to receive, as Nicodemus did, answers you don't expect. Take risks in your life, like Abraham did, but remember as you journey that God is your true and reliable compass. You'll have many opportunities to make your mark on the world, Georgiana. You'll have a good education, no doubt starting before very long at our church school, St John's Primary, where your brother Sebastian goes already. You'll have a good start there, with excellent guidance in how to live a good life.

I spoke just now about **Faith** as a Christian keyword. Another keyword you will hear as you are baptised today is **Grace**. Father Charles will pray for God to pour out his grace upon you - another of God's free gifts. Those free gifts don't come any better than God's! God's grace is what we depend on, his strength, his Spirit. It's there in unlimited quantities whenever we ask for it, and, by heaven, we need it. If we rely on our own strength we run out of steam very quickly, but God gives us a plentiful supply if we ask for it. We do that by being regular in our worship, in our prayers and in our study of the Bible. We all need to get that habit and stick to it; it's not just a good habit, it's a great habit and a necessary one!

A third keyword and free gift from God is **Light**. Jesus said *'I am the light of the world'*, (John 8:12). As you are baptised you will be given a candle to remind you of that, and remind us also that we should walk in his light and shine with his light. Nicodemus came to find Jesus when it was dark but when he met Jesus he met the Light of the world and his life changed for ever. Your life, too, Georgiana, will be changed and shaped by Jesus.

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."* (John 3:16) Those words we heard today are almost certainly the best known and important words in the entire gospel. They are sometimes called 'the gospel in a nutshell', and as you journey you may well find them in unexpected places. We shall hear our choir sing them a bit later on. We learn, on our journey of faith, helped by grace and lit up by the light of Jesus, to love God and love each other. God wants that so much because we are his children and he loves us. Always remember, Georgiana: God loves the world and he loves you.

Very soon now we shall welcome you into God's kingdom, a place of Faith and Grace and Light, of God's free gifts. But above all it's a place of Love. We can't wait!