

Good morning, God's people!

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit - the Advocate, to be with us forever. To comfort us. To sustain us. To guide us. To abide with us. As we continue to sort through, like those earliest disciples, what it means to live as Christ's body in the world.

And, on a day when we celebrate the Body of Christ as it takes shape in the Church, we welcome five of God's beloved into this community through the sacrament of baptism.

At baptisms, there's a temptation for the preacher to give a sermon that sounds a bit like a commencement address. With the charge to GO! And do awesome stuff! In the name of Christ! That's what commencing is about, right? Go out! Get to it!

But today is not a sending out. It is a welcoming in. I don't want to draw too much of a line between the two; our lives as Christians involves both. But we should linger in this welcoming. Because it is the most hope-filled way of welcome in our faith tradition, *and* because it is an introduction for these soon-to-be baptized, and a reminder for all of us, about the topsy-turvy world of new life in Jesus Christ.

Most of us are probably familiar with Dr. Brene Brown. Brown studies how we form relationships – how we understand what we are to each other. She teaches extensively about how vulnerability is the key to relationships. Think of vulnerability as the willingness to show up in a situation, even though you know you can't control the outcome; to be "all in," even when you know it can mean failing and hurting.

We do not like to be vulnerable. We're not usually taught how, and, more than that, each of us can think of perfectly legitimate reasons to *not* be vulnerable. At the root of each of those reasons is fear: fear of rejection, fear of harm, fear of that failure and hurt.

Brown says one of the most common ways we reject vulnerability is to put on armor -- those thoughts or feelings or behaviors that keep us protected and in control. And I was struck because I realized that's how I was thinking about baptism -- as putting on armor.

Suiting up for the big fight with this world: in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

I heard an interview with Brown years ago where the interviewer gently challenged her image of armor -- "What if we think about it as a scar?" he asked. "Because our armor is usually connected to our pain. Like a scar, the surface is tough but only because the wound beneath is tender."

Baptism is not about putting on armor, it is about being all in. Laying bare our tender fears; not only fears about how we live, but also how we die. Shedding the weighted ways we close ourselves off to God and each other. Letting holy water wash over us, quenching our deepest desire to be seen, known, and loved. / Not going into battle against the world, but opening ourselves to it.

I get how ridiculous this sounds. In a world where it would be safest to not only wear emotional armor, but physical armor too. Where there is war and gun violence, not just in places we may have never been to, but two blocks south of where we are right now. The idea that we would keep showing up in this world, open and hopeful and with something to lose, it doesn't make sense.

Isn't this how Jesus lived? And died? With a desire to be in true and right and risky relationship? Seeking out the vulnerable. Not protecting himself from the world's fears, but moving right into them with love. The topsy turvy-ness of our new life in Christ is that the power of Jesus' resurrection, the power we proclaim, the power with which we baptize, is not found in some superhero strength but in his holy vulnerability.

This is the life into which we welcome each of your children today. It is not an easy way to live. But we do. And we do get hurt. As a community, we are hurting right now. Confusion. Anger. Despair. Still, we open up ourselves time and again, because we believe a life in armor is no life at all. We have faith that, when we welcome in God's love as Jesus did, we create space for God's grace. We trust Christ's promise that it is only in baring our wounds, the ones we carry and the ones we cause, that we are truly healed and transformed.

And because these five beloveds will likely not remember this day - my talk of armor and vulnerability - they will rely on us to remind them of this welcome. Tell these beloveds your story. The best way they will remember their welcome into this life of faith is through our own living. Tell them the stories of *your* life in baptism. Show them. Show up for them. We are called to do this, not only today, but for their whole lives.

And, above all, let us go about this work together.

Many of you know the saying "There, but for the grace of God, go I." It's a way of expressing sympathy for people going through something awful. A way of thanking God for our own blessings or protection through God's grace.

Baptism is a reminder that grace does not work this way.

The grace we experience through God's-love-in-baptism binds us to God and one another forever. Grace doesn't promise protection. It promises connection. Because we aren't meant to live this way alone. I don't think we *can* live this way on our own. Look around you, whatever wounds you carry, whatever armor you wear, you are not alone. We welcome *in* so we can journey *with* one another; so we can live out our baptism together.

In seminary, I had one professor who urged us as Christians to drop this saying, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." To replace it with one that actually reflects how God's grace works in our lives. "Instead of 'there, but for the grace of God, go I,'" she would say, "Let us say, 'Therefore, *in* the grace of God, go *we*.'"

And so in God's grace, we go -- to the waters of baptism, to welcome these beloveds into this topsy turvy, messy, vulnerable, and transforming life in Jesus Christ. May it be so. Amen.

Rest assured that we are in good company for this calling.

We are in the company of Mary, who was asked to do something dangerous and unknown. Mary, who knew fear; the Bible tells us she was afraid when the angel Gabriel appeared. And yet, we have her Magnificat. And yet, she gave birth to Jesus. And yet, she stood by him at the foot of the cross. Mary pushed past her fears to speak up, and she declared a Word we still proclaim today. Tell these beloveds Mary's story, so they will speak up; build their own moral imagination. So they will be courageous and open to how God shakes up this world.

We are in the company of Peter, who struggled constantly between his desire to be right and in control with his deep love for Jesus. Peter, who listened for the Spirit. And who could sense and proclaim that Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Who came to know God's dream as one that is expansive and inclusive, even if it meant Peter had to change his mind about things he used to think were true. Who learned, never perfectly, but learned, how to believe he was truly loved by God and, as such, not just instructed but enlivened to care for God's sheep. Tell these beloveds Peter's story. So they too will know we all struggle and mess up. That God loves us even when we do. That it's okay to learn new things and change our minds, if it moves us towards loving our neighbor. That we carry Christ's peace with us, always.