

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
August 2, 2009
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Lead a life worthy of the calling.
Psalm 51:1–12, Ephesians 4:1–16, John 6:24–35

This sermon is in the form of a public letter to Case Leopold MacKay who was baptized today. You are invited to listen as I share the letter. I pray that what is said in it will make sense to him someday and inspire him in his faith in Jesus Christ.

Case, at the tender age of 48 days old, you were baptized in the First Presbyterian Church of Cheyenne, WY. You might ask what does it mean to have been baptized in a Christian Church? First of all, it meant that water was placed on your head in the name of the Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Understanding how God is three-in-one will take a lifetime of study and even then it will remain a mystery. All this means that when the water was placed on your head, and the Trinity blessing was given, God claimed you and sealed you to him to show that you belong to God. “God freed you from sin and death, uniting you with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. By water and the Holy Spirit, you were made a member of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to Christ’s ministry of love, peace, and justice.”

Another way to describe this action of God in baptism is to consider that at the moment you were born, your mom joyfully and lovingly held you next to her. Then your dad held you in the same manner. In holding you this way, they were claiming you as their own first born child. As you may have discovered your grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins eventually got to hold you and claim you, too. When your parents named you, they sealed you to the family. You are a MacKay and a Lovato and all the good that comes with that. In your baptism, the church also declared you to be a child of God, a child of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This means you will always be God’s child, regardless of your age. It means you will always be loved by God, and nothing will ever be able to take that love away from you. It means that everlasting life with God has been promised to you, if you but claim it by working with the Holy Spirit to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Case, God has claimed you, have you claimed God?

All this is really important stuff, Case, because as the scripture lesson from the Psalm says, we are sinners needing to be saved by God. As a baby you were born into a world where the spirit of sin runs rampant. Sin is whatever causes us to separate ourselves from God, harm others and ourselves. As promised in your baptism, God never stops loving us, but there are times where we stop loving God, others and ourselves. I am sorry to say that like a deadly virus, sin will inevitably infect you. Even great people of faith like King David who wrote Psalm 51 sinned. King David killed, cheated, lied, committed adultery and in effect tried to become his own god and was caught big time. God knows our sins. There is no getting away with them. Talking about sin when you were 48 days old, innocently lying in your parent’s arms may have seemed ludicrous at the time, but the truth is, according to the Bible, “We have all

sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23. When you turned two, most likely the stage of “No” and annoying tantrums began, and sin surfaced like a bad rash. Just watch any two year old and you will see what I mean. You see, the result of living a life of sin is everlasting death. God and we do not want this to happen to you.

Fortunately, Case, there is a cure for this deadly virus called sin. When the church placed water on your head, it was an outward sign that God in Jesus Christ had washed away your sin when Jesus gave his body and shed his blood on the cross for us. Because of Jesus’ crucifixion, God has forgiven us our sins, and will raise us from the dead just like he did Jesus. The deadly virus of sin no longer has the final say over you. The God who claimed and sealed you in baptism does.

Case, all I have described is called grace. Grace is God’s unending and unconditional love for us as seen in Jesus Christ. The psalm today speaks of this grace because God forgave King David of his sins when David deserved to die just like we do when we sin. David said he was sorry and would change his ways and so must we when we sin. Our confession of sin in worship helps us to do this. Our assurance of pardon in worship reminds us that by grace through faith in Jesus Christ we have been saved, forgiven and given another chance.

This grace of God is what you experienced even when you were in your mom’s womb. Your parents and family immediately loved you when they heard you existed and like God, they will always love you. God loved you before you were in the womb and again, will always love you. You cannot earn this grace, it is the truest of gifts.

Case, God’s amazing and saving grace did not just come to you in the act of baptism. It comes to you today with every beat of your heart. It continually feeds and nurtures you through the one called the Bread of Life, that is Jesus himself. Jesus talked about this in the passage from John. People back then had experienced Jesus feeding them lots of bread from just a few loaves and they followed him around wanting more. He told them that they missed the point, the physical bread was not really what they needed, what they needed was a relationship with him. Allowing his spirit come into them was the real bread of life, the bread that would nourish them forever. May you know Jesus as the Bread of your Life.

Today, the day of your baptism, Case, Jesus came to those of us present as the Bread of Life in the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist, the great thanksgiving. In the Lord’s Supper we remembered something I said before, that Jesus gave his body and blood on the cross to wash away or forgive us our sins. We also remembered that as in our baptisms, Jesus promised to be with us forever. Whenever the Lord’s Supper is shared, it is in the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup that we are fed by Jesus, the Bread of Life. His spirit comes into us again and again to nurture, cleanse and sustain us—forever. I pray that you know Jesus as the Bread of Life in every way possible, and have often experienced him in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of cup as you have participated in the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist.

Case, I also pray that by the time you read my simple attempt to communicate the meaning of your baptism and the communion served on that day, you will indeed understand what was done to and for you by God in Jesus Christ. If so, a large part of this nourishing education about this wonderful grace of God and Jesus as the bread of

life came to you through the human beings who raised you. On the day of your baptism there were over one hundred witnesses including your parents, grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. I mention all this because in the act of baptism your parents answered yes to the following question: "Relying on God's grace, do you promise to live the Christian faith, and to teach that faith to your child?" The rest of your family and the people attending church this day promised "to guide and nurture you by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging you to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of his church."

I pray that we have helped you to be so educated and inspired in the Christian faith that you are not, as Paul wrote in Ephesians, "tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming." I pray we were the conduits of the certainty of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ to you. I hope when you read and understand this letter someday you will hunt me down, if I am still alive, and let me know how the nourishing education about this wonderful grace of God and Jesus as the bread of life has gone.

Case, I pray and beg with the Apostle Paul that you "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." God bless you, Case. It was a joy to hold you, splash water on you, share the most power blessing I know over you, make a promise to you and write these words to you. Rev. Bob Garrard