

Adventure to the Secret place with Hidden Treasure – Homily for Harvest Festival with Baptism

Deuteronomy 8. 7-18

2 Corinthians 9. 6-end

Luke 12. 16-30

Let me tell you a story. When I was not much older than Era and Arbi, I lived in the countryside near a large wood. One day an old farmer told me that at the heart of the woods was a secret place. There was a clearing that always seemed to catch the sun, full of flowers and long grass dancing in the breeze. Some people said there was hidden treasure, Viking silver or gold buried by monks. With a twinkle in his eye, the farmer told me this place wasn't on any map and no-one had found the treasure because it was guarded by tree spirits and ghosts of the monks.

As soon as I heard this, I hatched a plan to find the treasure. Before long, one sunny Sunday afternoon, along with two friends and my dog, we prepared to go into the woods. We looked on a map and guessed where the centre of the woods would be. We packed a compass, matches, a pocketknife and peanut butter sandwiches. We were excited, dreaming of what we would buy with the treasure. We were also a little scared about tree spirits and ghosts. But we laughed off our fears and set off.

Let me stop and come back to the story later. I would like to say a few words to Era and Arbi. I'm sure you have already been on many adventures, exciting and scary. Perhaps some were in real life and others were in your imaginations when reading a story or watching a film. Well, in a short while you are going to be baptised. I will pour water over your heads and say I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This marks the beginning of the greatest adventure there is, your adventure with God.

Although I'll only use a small amount of water, baptism is like diving into the deep blue ocean teeming with life, mystery and colour. In baptism we are plunged into the deep waters of God's life shown in Jesus and his love for others. We are plunged into God's identity as a relationship of endless love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism is the beginning of an adventure in which we discover how to love and see the world as God does – as gifts to be shared.

This is what we do by using water in baptism. We use the gift of water to celebrate how everyone is a gift of God's love – including you Era and Arbi. Water and air, the sun and stars, the plants and animals, rivers and oceans, the whole universe, time and space – these are all gifts of God's love that splashes about everywhere. This means that everything is a hidden treasure precious in God's sight. When we are baptised, to look out for how the world is full of hidden treasure, God's gifts, becomes like a compass in our adventure.

In fact, today is a good day to be baptised because we are also celebrating our harvest festival. That is why you can see flowers, fruit and vegetables at the front of the church. At harvest we give thanks to God for all the gifts of creation especially for the food grown on the land. And the best way to say thank you is not just to keep things to ourselves, but receive them and share them as gifts of love.

Like any adventure, there are challenges. It can be difficult to love others. We can be selfish and so can others. This points to a deeper truth about sharing in Jesus's life in baptism. When humans ignored God and stopped using the things of the earth as gifts of love and hurt others, God became human as Jesus. God joins our adventure as one of us to share God's love even when all seems lost. Even when people rejected Jesus and killed him, God's love made Jesus rise again from the dead. In Jesus, God shows nothing can stop him loving us. And in baptism, we share in Jesus's dying and rising and join in God's adventure of love, celebrating each person as a treasured gift even in face of the greatest difficulties.

As with every adventure, God knows there are things we need. I'll mention six. First, because in baptism we live in Jesus and Jesus lives in us, we are never truly alone. Jesus is always close to us like a friend. Secondly, however desperate things are, we can always pray to Jesus for help or we say the prayer Jesus taught us and pray to Our Father in heaven. Thirdly, God gives us a map in the form of the bible which

is full of stories about how people got lost and found their way again in God's love. Fourthly, God feeds us on our journey which is why in worship we share bread and wine just like Jesus did with his disciples, telling them that every time they did this he would be present with them. Fifthly, in baptism, God gives each of us a special mission, something only we can do as a treasured gift of God. We discover this mission with help from others. And so, sixthly, God gives us other people who love us, especially our family, godparents, friends and other members of the church. They are on the same adventure as us.

Let me return to my story. Much happened during our adventure in the woods. We got lost a lot. We fell in streams and bramble bushes. The dog ran away. A few times we saw something that looked like a monk and ran like we'd never run before. We were about to give up when suddenly a ray of sun led us into a green space full of long grass and wildflowers. Surely this was the secret place. We sat down and ate the peanut butter sandwiches. As if by magic, the dog appeared. After eating we lay down, looked up into the deep blue sky and began to tell stories about all that had happened. We didn't even think about hidden gold or silver. We had found something much more precious, the gift of our friendship, the beauty of God's creation, and the good stories that fill human hearts with adventure.

This is what being baptised members of the Church is like. Church is the secret place where people come together to share in God's

adventure of love. When we come to church to pray and worship God, and hear stories about God with us, we receive and share the things of the world as hidden treasures of God's love: water in baptism, bread and wine in the Eucharist, people in Communion. We carry this love as a treasure hidden in our hearts wherever we go. And so our adventure becomes one great harvest festival where we plant love, grow love and share love in all we do.