

*At this service, we celebrated Gavin Alexander Stewart McCoy's baptism.*

## **WELCOMING DIVINE CONVERSATION**

### **Pentecost 3 – Cycle B: 1 Sam. 15:34 – 16:13; 2 Cor. 5:6-17; Mk. 4:26-34**

One of the interesting and unique characteristics of the Hebrew Bible is the element of divine conversation in so many of its stories and accounts. God was quite talkative, it seems, until the exiles returned home from Babylon. The prophets had no peace: God always had something more to say to the Hebrew people, captive in Babylon.

Of course effective communication requires both a talker and a listener, and the stories and accounts of people like Samuel, who seem to know every thought God has, suggest that Samuel listened for God's voice. Samuel had faith in a God who is present in human experience and events, as did those who recorded his story and others like it in Holy Scripture. The subtext of these stories and accounts is that we listen for God's voice because faith calls us to do so; we pray and worship and study God's Word and live to the glory of God because faith calls us to do so. Faith is the pre-condition for divine conversation; and for Christians, faith calls us to receive Jesus of Nazareth as the most eloquent and complete word in the conversation God seeks with humanity. Christians come to know Jesus as not only as the Word of God or the Word-made-flesh, but as the *living* Word of God; God's continuous and continual good news for a world that easily loses its way without the benefit of divine conversation.

It is into this understanding of Jesus as the living Word of God that we welcome Gavin today. Here and in his home, he will catch the gift of faith and will see and understand the world into which he has been born as God's world; a world in which God is present, especially when God's word lives through the community of people we know as the church.

But God's word is not only alive in Jesus Christ, it also lives in us. And that same faith that makes us good listeners and makes possible divine conversation, can also transform us into talkers; evangelists; people who embody God's good news in this world that easily loses its way without the benefit of divine conversation. And this continuity, this apostolic succession, if you will, is important. It is why we rejoice at each and every baptism. Today's Gospel tells us that the kingdom of God grows exponentially without our notice. In Gavin's baptism, we see another seed planted; God's word continuing; fruit bearing seed which, in turn, will bear more fruit.

And think about Samuel in our First Reading this morning: if there hadn't been a faithful Hannah, she would never have taken Samuel to faithful Eli. If Samuel had not learned from Eli to listen to God's voice, David would never have been anointed as king of Israel: and God's word to the Jewish people, spoken through the reign of David would never have been spoken or heard. Everything we read in the Hebrew Bible illustrates the fragility of faith because the world is an ambiguous place: we need divine conversation; we need God's word to live in our heart, the apostle Paul reminds us in today's Second Reading. We walk by faith, and not by sight. It is the ambiguity of human existence that Paul addresses in this morning's Second Reading. Jesus has changed all that, Paul says: Jesus has reframed what it means to be human by showing humanity the power and nearness of God's saving love. But we need divine conversation, Paul counsels, although he does not use that term. "Live beyond yourself," he says; "don't feel condemned just because by being at home in the body, we feel away from the Lord. We walk by faith, and not by sight."

Intuition is the helpmate of faith, and is often the medium for divine conversation. On this day when we give thanks for good and responsible fathers, some of us will intuit the grace of God and deep blessing in such relationships. Some will see their father or someone who has become like a father to them as God's word of love, nurture, and support in their life. If that is so, we do well to give thanks for the gifts we have received in such men.

But it is never Father's Day without also being Christian Family Sunday, and so we can look beyond our fathers, especially if that relationship has been troubled. Christian Family Sunday allows us to acknowledge that the love and grace of God is unbounded; that in God's mercy, the divine conversation which is so essential to being able to live in hope can be carried by any and all who love as God loves – unconditionally and sacrificially; that the Spirit of God, the living Word of God, the Christ, lives within and

among us and seeks us out. And that through the grace of divine conversation, however limited we feel such communion with God might be, we are never alone; never beyond God's embrace.

We give thanks today for the proclamation of Gavin's baptism, that is also the proclamation of our own baptism and the foundation of the people of God in Christ Jesus, the church. "I love you," God says to Gavin and to us. "I will never leave you. I will never stop talking to you. Listen for my voice!"