

SUNDAY 5TH JULY BAPTISM SERVICE

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-end

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

Friends, brothers and sisters — and especially to Charles, who cannot yet hear these words but who will, I hope, one day read them — welcome. What a day this is.

In our reading from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has been speaking about John the Baptist, about a generation that refuses to play along —

“children in the marketplace who won't dance when the flute plays, who won't mourn when the lament begins”

It's a picture of people who have made up their minds in advance, who will find fault whatever they encounter. John came fasting and they called him possessed. Jesus came eating and drinking and they called him a glutton and a drunkard. If we are honest, this is not about **one generation** but **every generation**, and its not so much that:

they/we want to have our cake and eat it

its that

they/we want to have the cake, eat it, complain about the ingredients and calories and then say we never liked cake anyway.

But then our passage takes an extraordinary turn — Jesus lifts his eyes from the critics and speaks a prayer. And it is one of the most beautiful prayers in the Gospels.

"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth," he says, "because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

Infants. *Nēpiois* in the Greek. Little ones. Those who know nothing yet of theology, of doctrine, of the long arguments of learned men. Those who simply receive.

I want to suggest to you today that this prayer of Jesus is, in a profound sense, the theology of Baptism.

Think about what we are doing here today. We are not baptising Charles because of anything he has achieved. We are not marking a moment of intellectual assent, a decision made after long deliberation, a reward for good behaviour. There were no tests or exams Charles had to pass; *in fact, Charles has done nothing* — and that is precisely the point. He arrives here today in exactly the state Jesus describes: an infant, open-handed, unknowing, and in that very unknowing, perfectly placed to receive.

The Church of England's baptism liturgy speaks of how in baptism we are ***"buried with Christ in his death"*** and ***"raised with him to new life."*** We join a story not of our own making. We are written into a narrative far larger and older and more glorious than ourselves. This child today is being grafted into that story — before he can agree to it, before he can understand it, before he can even say the word "yes."

And the grace of that — the sheer unearned grace of it — is staggering.

Jesus continues in our reading with words that have echoed down two thousand years:

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Now, Charles is not yet weary as we would understand that word. He has not yet accumulated the weight that life can bring. But he will. We all do. Life — in all its beauty and wonder and pain — has a way of loading us down. And what Jesus offers here is not an escape from that weight. He does not promise a life without difficulty. He promises *himself* — a companion in the carrying, a yoke shared.

A yoke, in the ancient world, was always designed for two. You yoked two animals together so the burden of the plough was distributed between them. When Jesus says *"take my yoke upon you,"* he is saying: we carry this together. Whatever life brings, you do not carry it alone.

That is what this community around this font is promising today. Not that Charles's life will be perfect. Not that he will never struggle or grieve or doubt.

But that he will never be alone. He is being surrounded — by his family, his godparents, this congregation, and by the God who, Jesus tells us, is *"gentle and humble in heart."*

Not a God of thunder and terror. A God who is *gentle*. A God who meets us where we are.

There is one more phrase in our reading I want to linger over. Jesus says:

"All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

"Anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

The knowledge of God, Jesus is saying, is not a matter of IQ or achievement or social standing. It is a gift. It is given — to infants, to the weary, to those humble enough to receive it. And in baptism, this child is being placed into exactly that stream of gift.

He comes with nothing. He receives everything.

So to Charles — and to his family — I want to say this: today you are making promises you cannot fully keep, and trusting a God who keeps every promise he makes. You are declaring that this life, this small and precious life, belongs not ultimately to you but to the One who made him and loves him with a love beyond all reckoning.

The wise and the learned may argue about all this. The critics may stand in the marketplace and find fault. But here, in this place, with water and word and the gathered people of God, something is happening that no argument can undo.

A child is being named.

A child is being claimed.

And that, thanks be to God, is enough.

Amen.
