

Our first Scripture reading today was the piece from Isaiah Chapter 43 that is very appropriate for a baptism. The prophet tells the people of Israel that they are loved by God and precious in God's sight. This message was important for them to hear; at that time, their leaders were in prison in Babylon after a disastrous military defeat. They needed to hear that God had not forgotten them.

I see this passage as a parable for the love that surrounds Grady from his parents, relatives, and friends here today, as well as the love that God has for Grady and for all of us. Grady is loved by his parents and friends and is precious to them. As an expression of that love, in a few minutes we will ask Grady's parents and sponsors to make baptismal promises on his behalf. These six promises are to bring Grady up in the Christian faith, to teach him by word and example to treat other people with dignity and respect, and similarly to care for all of God's Creation (which means more than just putting recyclables in the blue box!). These promises are difficult to keep. In order to love our neighbours as ourselves, as Jesus told us, we have to set aside our prejudice. This is more than just the Golden Rule, "do to others as you would be done by them." To love others as yourself means that you must first love yourself – not egotistically or selfishly, but having self-respect, being comfortable in your own skin. We will not always succeed, but the promises have two caveats. First, when we fail in some respect, that we will return to our best intentions. Second, that when we say "we will" to the promises, that we ask for divine help in achieving what we have promised. So our promises include teaching Grady how to love and respect himself so that he can love and respect other people.

Today's Gospel reading began with Jesus' rejection by the people of Nazareth. His home-town folks didn't believe that he could perform miraculous deeds. "Who does this guy think he is? He's just the carpenter's son, and those people are just his brothers and sisters?" This isn't just a Bible story; it's everyday life. People always look for the outside saviour, and often overlook the solid candidate that they have known all along. They have unrealistic expectations about the outsider. They have heard about the person's good qualities, but they don't yet know them well enough to have seen their flaws. Business corporations do this: the business section of the *Globe & Mail* often reports stories of CEOs who were recruited with high hopes and then dumped a couple of years later when they did not measure up to impossible expectations. Parishes do the same thing – the new Rector will increase the congregation and fix the budget problems. Until, that is, he or she actually arrives and the parish discovers that the new Rector does not have a magic wand.

Speaking of impossible expectations, I have told the story before about a magazine article in which a woman in her 40's despaired that she had not found a husband, although she had dated many men. She eventually realized that in her never-ending search for Mr. Perfect, she had overlooked many Mr. Good-enoughs. Probably corporations and parishes pass over many candidates who were not spectacular, but were good enough. Today, we baptize Grady Potts; I'm sure that Jess and Kevin hope that they will be perfect parents and that Grady and Everett will turn out to be perfect sons. It probably won't happen; what is realistic and achievable is that Kevin and Jess will be Good-Enough parents, and that Everett and Grady will be Good Enough to grow up into decent young men.

In respect of placing unreasonable expectations on young people, years ago, we used to say, "You should try to be the very best you can be." Somewhere along the line it changed into, "You can do anything that you dream of doing." The second statement is patently false, and can end up being very cruel. I saw this at the University of Guelph, with students devastated because their dream – or, worse, their parents' dream for them – to be accepted into the veterinary program had been dashed because they did not get good marks in their chemistry course. No matter how much I might have dreamed about playing for the Blue Jays (or growing up in England, playing for the England cricket team!), it wasn't going to happen. I am useless at connecting bat to ball.

In the second part of the Gospel story, Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs to preach and undertake a healing ministry. The disciples were told to travel without extras – no money, no change of clothes, no food. They had to depend on the hospitality of the people they met. And if the residents of a particular village were unfriendly, they were not to bother further, but to shake the dust off their sandals, as a way of saying that this village was a lost cause for their ministry. Jesus had already done just that when he got a negative reception to his own ministry in his home town. When the people rejected him, he left Nazareth and – in the sentence that links the two stories – "He went about among the villages teaching." Jesus shook the dust of Nazareth off his feet and went elsewhere – there were plenty of other villages to evangelize. It is similar to what happened in the recent provincial election. Like most of our street, we had a Green Party Mike Schreiner sign on our lawn, so no Conservative or Liberal or NDP candidates came knocking on our door – there was no point in bothering with our house. Those other candidates figuratively shook the dust of our house from their feet. There were plenty of other people in Guelph to go and canvass/evangelize.

I have already said that Jesus' rejection in his home town is connected to the story of the disciples' 'mission trip' to the outlying villages. The disciples had cast out many demons, and cured many sick people, so the overall result of the mission trip had been positive. Although I'm sure that the disciples had encountered some unfriendly villages, they seem to have returned in good spirits.

But there is also a between these stories and today's baptismal promises. We plan to keep our promises – with God's help – but we know that we will not always succeed. However, if we think about it, we realize that the advice Jesus gave the disciples is the parallel to all sorts of ordinary proverbs. "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." "Hope for the best but prepare for the worst." "You can't always get what you want." Most relevant of all – "If at first you don't succeed, try again." Jesus acted on this sort of ordinary advice and told his disciples to do the same.

There is no deep theology in today's Gospel reading. It is simply a pair of stories that contain pearls of ordinary wisdom for ordinary people like ourselves. These homespun adages are time-tested advice for how to face life's challenges. They relate to the baptismal promises that we are making on behalf of Grady today. When we mess up or things don't go the way we hoped, we could dress this up in the theological language of our second baptismal promise, namely, "Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?" Or we could imagine God saying to us in ordinary language, "If at first you don't succeed, you just have to try again."