



Whenever I see the Happy Sew & Sews at work here on a Thursday, I am reminded how grateful I am for others who are more than a few threads above me on the creative scale. And not only creative, but passionate about what might be rather tedious work. And not only passionate about doing such things for their own collection at home or for their families, but to selflessly give of their time-consuming and energy-demanding work for the benefit of others, some of such recipients of quilts or hats or bookbags or whatever else, they will never meet. But, today, we give thanks for the beautiful work of Deann, JoAnn, and Sue, with this baptismal banner.

And when they came up this morning for the dedication prayer and blessing, we sang the hymn, the title of which is on this banner, "You Are Mine." Now, you noticed it is not easiest song to navigate in our hymnal. The notes bounce around in pitch, the rhythm keeps you on your toes. And perhaps that is absolutely perfect for the baptized life nowadays, or for those who haven't quite made it to their neighborhood church font just yet. I like to think through it all, the words on that banner, the title of that hymn, forever applies from God: "You are mine." And not in a domineering, controlling sense, but that, no matter what, "I am going to hold onto you with a love that simply cannot be broken. You are mine forever."

Now, of course, when we are so privileged to be part of baptizing a child of God, we hope they are sent forth from our sanctuary waters into a life of Sunday schools and vacation Bible schools and youth groups and mission trips into married life and children here before committee and volunteer and council service. However, we are fully aware that does not always turn out to be the case. And yet, no matter our concern or hoping for more, "They are mine," because they too need the words from the hymn; no matter how much it may be a struggle to believe its truth: "I will come to you in the silence, I will lift you from all your fear. You will hear My voice, I claim you as My choice. Be still, and know I am near. I am hope for all who are hopeless, I am eyes for all who long to see. In the shadows of the night, I will be your light. Come and rest in Me."

You will also notice on the banner that the design of the cross is actually from the same image used on the cover of our red hymnal in the pews, meant to symbolize the tree of life given to us on the cross of Jesus Christ, and that surrounding the cross are meant to portray leaves, as a reminder that, with the grace of our Lord magnified on Calvary long ago, when heaven was forever united with earth; that, from that moment, we are set free to help flourish this world with such an extravagant Gospel of mercy and hope, including to those still struggling with what baptism and Communion and scripture and the church and even what God means in their life; to still help them believe that, they are God's, too.

So, it's rather fitting for this Gospel text to be brought forth today, as a reminder that we believe from baptismal waters, we are called by God to be the living disciples of Jesus Christ for the sake of the world, to follow the most beautiful example of our Lord in showing compassion to this world that often struggles to find it. And, soon enough, we will call forward our council leaders and all those serving on the various teams of ministry in our church family. We will offer our collective blessing to them, and reassure them of the Gospel: that no matter how hard church ministry may get to navigate in a rather interesting surrounding terrain; no matter what, all of them, all of you, are God's forever and ever.

In the background of the banner is the majestic reminder of the baptismal waters, waters of which go way beyond any church building font, and instead, reach to the edges of all that exists; waters that take us onto shores of lives, who, again, struggle to find compassion from humanity, from the church, even from God. Waters that are just as beautiful in those honest and grace-filled conversations with those who wonder about all of this; waters that are just as beautiful in those moments as when they're calm in our fonts. Waters that won't remain still, because this Holy Spirit cannot sit still. There's too much to share in sanctuary and sewing spaces and well beyond our walls.

There's too much joy to not share this Saturday when we invite neighbors to come by and catch a glimpse of what we believe God yearns for community to be. There's too much love not to share with every child who comes by this week for vacation Bible school, that no matter where they come from, this place, this God will always be for them. There's too much Gospel that not only inspires a beautiful banner, but hopefully will still convince all of us, that no matter how bleak the worldly circumstances may be, the Gospel will always remain for you and everyone else. "You are God's and that nothing will ever happen in this life to separate you from that love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." So, for that Greatest News for us all, and for all the ways you share it with others, thanks be to God, for you, too. Amen!