

The Most Beautiful Baby in the World

Hespeler, March 26, 2023 © Scott McAndless – Fifth Sunday in Lent, Baptism

[Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-12, 23](#), Ezekiel 37:1-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8:6-11, John 11:1-45

I was reading recently in the Letter to the Hebrews in the eleventh chapter, the famous chapter on the nature of faith. **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,”** it begins, **“the conviction of things not seen.”** And it goes on from there to lay out many examples from biblical history of people who displayed extraordinary faith in God under trying circumstances.

But I was particularly struck by what it says when it comes to the parents of Moses. Now, Moses’ parents, as you may recall, had their child under some pretty extreme circumstances. Their people, the Hebrews, were enslaved in the land of Egypt. And the pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, had apparently decided that they were just too many of these Hebrews. He wanted to reduce the population by decreeing that all male Hebrew babies were to be thrown into the Nile River at birth.

Moses’ Parents

So, this is what the writer to the Hebrews says about Moses’ parents: **“By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”** And right off the bat, obviously, good for them for disobeying what was clearly a horribly unjust law. But what strikes me in that is what the letter writer tells us about their reason why.

They did it, he says, because they saw that the child was beautiful. Think about that for a moment. There are a few things that that statement makes me wonder. And, since we have a couple of experts here today on the subject of infant beauty, maybe they could help us to answer my questions.

It Requires Faith?

Brittany and Ian, now I know that it is manifestly obvious to everyone who is present here today that your baby, Rosalynn, is objectively the most beautiful baby ever born. I mean, look at her! So, I am wondering, why on earth would anyone think that it would take extraordinary faith for parents like you to see that she was beautiful?

I mean, it is an odd thing to say, isn’t it? How many parents have you heard of who *don’t* think that their baby is beautiful? And, in the context of that story in the book of Exodus, you’ve got to ask about all of those other Hebrew parents who didn’t have the courage to hide their baby from the king’s edict. Is he implying that they didn’t think their babies were beautiful? Or is it saying that Moses was the only beautiful Hebrew baby born that year? Somehow, that doesn’t make much sense to me.

I did go back and check, by the way, in the Book of Exodus. And it turns out that the letter to the Hebrews is quite right. The only reason why Exodus says that Moses’ mother hid her boy was because **“she saw that he was a fine baby.”** Apparently, it was just because he was beautiful.



Parents Loving Children

So, I wonder why the Letter to the Hebrews chooses to underline this as an extraordinary example of faith. Nothing could be more ordinary than a mother thinking her child beautiful! But at the same time, I think it is right. Being a parent and loving your child (which obviously means more than just thinking that they are beautiful, but that is part) – loving your child is an act of extraordinary faith.

You know that, Brittany and Ian. I have no doubt that when Rosalynn was born, you felt an immediate bond with her and saw the beauty that was in her.

But that love was also immediately put to the test as, for about the first week of her life, she struggled. You feared for her. You were no doubt tempted at times to despair for her. But your love for her never failed even in the darkest moments. More than that, your love prevailed. I know that the doctors and the nurses did so much for her. But I have absolutely no doubt that your steadfast love for her was ultimately what pulled her through.

And the author of the letter is absolutely correct about that one thing at least, that kind of love is indeed a supreme demonstration of faith. It is about believing in someone even when they would seem to have nothing to offer. It is about seeing the value and strength in them even when they are at their weakest. That is what you chose to do for Rosalynn.

A Testimony of Faith

So I want to thank you, Brittany and Ian, for sharing your testimony of faith with us today. By sharing with us your story of a love that took you through a time of trials and that has now led to this child thriving, you are teaching us about the kind of faith we need at a very important time in the life of this congregation.

But this is not just about the amazing story of Rosalynn up until this point in her young life. This is also about why we are here on this day in particular. I know that it's not just by chance that you have come to us today, on this fifth Sunday of Lent. I have no doubt whatsoever that God has chosen to send you to us on this day because God is saying something really important to us through you.

Our Journey

We are on a journey here at St. Andrews Hespeler. We started the year by taking a good look at where we are as a congregation and what the challenges are as we prepare for a future that we know will be filled with change and many challenges.

During this season of Lent we have been doing our very best to open our hearts and listen to what God is saying to us about the questions that have come out of that process. And, as you see on the very walls of this sanctuary, one exercise that we've been doing has included celebrating the long history of this congregation.

A Timeline

You will see on the walls many pictures and mementos of the past life of this church. But do not make the mistake of thinking that this is just a highlight reel – an exercise in celebrating a glorious past. No, what we've been celebrating is all of the ways in which this congregation has played a key role in so many people's lives.

People have been formed here, they have grown and developed their passions and interests. People have celebrated some of the most important milestones of their lives including baptism, marriage, the death of a loved one and many other significant changes in this place and with this community.

Rosalynn's Place in it

And I find it very meaningful that you, Rosalynn, should join us on this day at the climax of our celebration of that significant history. Because you are a part of that history. I know that there are many with your family name who have shared in this history. Not only that, don't think that I didn't notice that you also bear the name of a Shirley who has been much loved and respected by the people of this congregation.

Your father and many other children from your family were also baptised and grew up with this church as an important part of their life. In fact, I understand that, over an entire century, babies from your family were baptised here wearing the very same dress that you are wearing today. You are an important link to our past today.

But you are also more than that. You are a symbol of the future. You are just beginning your journey with the church today. And, as is true anytime we look into the future, we do not know what your faith journey will look like.

Your parents have promised to teach you about Jesus and what Jesus has done for you. We as a congregation have promised to support them in that task.

Following Through on these Promises

Those are not necessarily easy promises to make. Both this congregation and your parents will face some challenges in terms of knowing how to follow through on those promises in the changing world where we find ourselves today.

But that is okay. For these are promises made in faith. Your parents had faith in you during those early days, perhaps even in those moments when it was hard to believe, and they bring that same kind of faith to the promises that they made here today. So do we as a congregation.

It is true that we don't necessarily know how we can best support your family as they raise you and set you on a good course in life. Things are changing so fast these days that, not only do the approaches that worked so well in the past not seem to work the same way anymore, but we can't even be sure that the approaches that work today will still be working the same way tomorrow.

But that should not frighten us in the church. We are called to be people who are like Moses' parents, who love so much and so unconditionally that they never give up even when things look impossible.

The People of Abraham

We are the people of Abraham. I love the way that the letter to the Hebrews describes the faith of Abraham who, at God's call and invitation, set out to go to an entirely new country that he had never seen, giving up everything that was familiar. **"By faith Abraham... set out, not knowing where he was going,"** it says, **"For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."**

That is how it works. We have taken Rosalynn into the life of the church even though we do not know all that she will do and be. She will grow up to have her own thoughts and ideas and she may very well come to see Jesus and the church differently from how some of us see those things right now. She will also have to decide for herself at some point whether she wants to be a full member of a church.

But all of that is okay. None of it has prevented us from baptizing her today because we don't have to control the grace that is given to her in her baptism today. Not even her parents will ultimately control that, though they will help to shape it.

We do this not because we know what will come of it but because we can be confident that God will take everything that she is and everything that she will be and shape her into the person that God wants to unleash on the world for its good.

Looking Forward

We do it, in other words, because we look **“forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** And isn't that so much more fun than just knowing exactly how it is going to all work out?

And if that is true for Rosalynn, how much more is it true for us as the church. Oh, I know that all of us have certain ideas of what this church is supposed to be. Most of those ideas are, of course, based on what we have experienced of the church in the past.

But the church that we are committed to, the one that we love and to whom we have pledged faithfulness in this journey, is not the church of the past. The church that we are committed to is **“the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”**

Love, Faith and Commitment

Someday in the future, it is practically inevitable, Rosalynn will make some choice or direct her life in some way that her parents do not anticipate and maybe never imagined that she would do. It happens to every child in some way at some point, so of course it will happen to her.

But, having seen Ian and Brittany's love for her and what it has brought her through so far, can you imagine that they would reject her or stop loving her because of such a thing? Of course not! They have faith in her like Moses' parents had faith and it will keep them through difficult and changing times.

Our love for and commitment to the church works in the same way. We can't afford to just love the church that has been. Our commitment to the church is a commitment to a **“city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** And the architect and builder is not done with building this church yet. We are in for the journey together. And we will act in faith as God leads us to that future.