

Finity and Infinity, Man and God
The Baptismal Sermon For Tate and Lakin Skillman

Well, Tate and Lakin, here we are again, we the people of God. You are new to this, but we are veterans, having brought many souls to the edge of the living waters of baptism. We are part of God's family, and we are going to dunk you into those waters today, and your life will be forever changed. You will discover that we are servants of the most amazing, most loving, most giving God that one could imagine. You will learn that our people think of the universe as God's first gift to us; we ourselves as another gift as we are born into it; another gift is God's self as She gives Himself to us as an intimate companion to walk with. God keeps piling gift upon gift in our lives. Baptism is one of those gifts, a primary one, that is life-changing. In baptism, God reaches down into the natural goodness that is you and the universe and raises you to a new level of existence, living with a share in His own life in addition to the natural life that is already yours. We have been struggling for two thousand years to understand what that signifies and have not yet exhausted the meaning. Now you can explore along with us.

One of the things you will discover is that this God of life is not shy about death. God has made us of fragile materials, the dust of the stars themselves, and this fragile stuff is subject to the limitations of space and time. What that means is that we run down and fall apart, as the entire universe eventually will. It is what we call death and it comes to us in many different forms. But it is not an occasion for endless sorrow. God has intervened in the natural falling-apart of the world and claimed human life (and probably other life as well) as Her own, to live with Him in everlasting joy. We leave our stardust bodies behind, and they return to their basic elements forged in the heart of ancient stars. But who we are, our person, our soul, our whatever-you-want-to-call-it, us, is preserved by God. God is so passionately in love with all of us that He makes sure we will always be with Her. You will come to know about this eternal heaven of joy, and you will rejoice as we do.

You will need to come to us, Tate and Lakin, so that we might teach you the treasures we have. Our Teacher and Master, Jesus Christ, talked about bringing out old and new treasures to share with one another. (Matthew 13.52) We have such wonderful things to teach you, in Sunday School, in youth group, in worship week by week. God is always there for us, but as with all things worthwhile, a little effort brings forth great rewards. You will learn that our people are eternal optimists, that nothing can keep us down, that even death has been conquered by this mysterious God who has given Himself to us in Jesus. In Jesus, the divine mystery is made clearer and more accessible and even more mysterious. Seems paradoxical, doesn't it? In this finite, human life we see some characteristics of the infinite divine Life that is the basis for our existence. That is why we treasure the love, life, death, resurrection, and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. They help us to know God. But some people find it difficult to accept that God would be that gracious, that an infinite God would even notice us tiny dust motes circling a tiny star in a backwater part of the universe. That is the mystery we proclaim and that we will explore together. We hope that you will become ones who are open to the possibilities that God presses upon us.

We have read today a couple of pages worth of passages from our holy writings, from our scriptures, the Bible, a collection of ancient books that tell us about God's ways with the ancients and with us moderns. That is why we turn to it over and over, both in public worship and in private devotions, as we ask God's Spirit to help us understand and live by the model that God holds up for us. See what those readings tell us today:

Our reading from the book of *Genesis* (18.1-10) is part of the story of our ancestors Abraham and Sarah. This part tells us that God knows and visits His children and promises and provides goodness to them. You will need to know this for your lives, for it makes all the difference in the world for what your lives will mean. You will learn that God is infinitely forgiving, but that he is no push-over, and that She has standards. Psalm 15 tells us of some of those standards. Luke's gospel reading (10.38-42) shows us the God-man Jesus teaching that life is about balancing priorities, about being reflective and being active, both necessary in engaging the world. Because a human being who is also God is hard for us to understand, our reading from *Colossians* (1.15-28) is particularly exciting. It is the reflections of an early theologian or thinker-about-God on what this God-man Jesus is all about. You will find it always helpful in your thinking about God, life, yourself, and your neighbor – especially if you explore it with the humility that allows you to be open to what is outside of yourself.

Be sure to hold onto two important elements of your spiritual heritage: the Bible as holy writings and the community of faith that interprets and lives out what God is doing with us. We call that community "church" and you are becoming members of a particularly rich part of it. The Bible and the Church are treasures right up there with your language, your culture, your family and its legends – all these create and shape who you will become.

Well, Tate and Lakin, it is time to stop. We are glad you have come into God's world. We are glad you are joining us as God's particular servants. We will stand with you all your life long. We hope you will stand with us all your life long. God's peace in Jesus Christ to you, now and always. Amen.

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