

On the occasion of the baptism of Stella Addison Grave

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus says

²⁶ “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:26–28 (ESV)

And Saint Paul writes;

How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Romans 6:2–5 (ESV)

Let us pray. Lord, sanctify us in the truth, your word is truth. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Stella has died!

At the beginning of her now short life, it's a strange way to start isn't it, to say that Stella has died today. But this is what Saint Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, that in baptism we have died. This is not a lonely death, this is not a sad death, this is a glorious death, united with Christ in his death. This is the greatest achievement of our lives that in baptism we die with Christ. And just like Stella, when you were baptized you didn't do a thing. We die with Jesus the Saviour who suffered and died for us. Baptism unites us to his death. All the benefits that Christ won on the cross are given to us in baptism. His suffering is given to us. The sin which so readily clings to us is given to Him and he bears it on the cross, our sins which cause us physical and spiritual death (separate us from God). He takes them down with Him from the cross and they are placed into the tomb and sealed. Our sins are buried and destroyed with Christ in his death. And this is not the end, Christ has destroyed it, he has conquered death, he is now alive he has burst out of the tomb leaving our sins behind, gone!

This has all been given to you today, Stella. This has all been given to you, people of Burnie (Launceston), in your baptism.

This new life, on the other side of death, is given to you. It is the Christian life, living united with Christ, this is what it means to be a disciple. Losing our life and finding it in Christ. Daily putting off sin, placing it on the cross, in the grave, with the Saviour where it belongs and living as the new creation he created you to be. This is the Christian struggle: to identify sin, put it away, to run from it and run to Christ the life giver, to run from death (that is spiritual death, separated from God), and run to life, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is what the disciples had to comprehend and struggle with as Jesus sent them out to preach. When he sends them out, he tells them they are going to experience all kinds of persecution, and even in the face of this persecution they should not lose hope. They should not fear earthly death over and above spiritual death because they are valuable in God's eyes, even protected by him, but they are going to become separated from their relatives and loved ones because of their newfound faith.

We must wrestle with this in our life, even baby Stella needs to wrestle with this although we think she can't comprehend it. We must understand the persecutions we will face, that we are facing and see that we should not fear these persecutions more than we fear separation from God or what he can do in judgment for eternity.

Jesus tells us ²⁸ **do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**

He tells us that we must fear him. He is the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. He is the one that we confess, 'is coming to judge the living and the dead', that is to separate those who will live in eternal life with him and those who will live in eternal death in hell. He is the one we should fear as we learned in the first commandment; 'I am the Lord your God you shall have no other gods before me. What does this mean; we should fear, love, and trust God above all things.' And when we fear God as we should he repeatedly proclaims, fear not!

Being united with Christ puts all our fears into perspective. Let us talk about some of the persecutions and therefore fears that are applicable in the gospel reading today as Jesus sends out the 12.

The first persecution we have revealed in today's text and therefore the first thing we might be inclined to fear is that we will be sided with the devil by our society. Jesus in his preaching is accused of casting demons by the prince of demons. The accusation here from the Scribes and Pharisees is that Jesus is in league with the devil. He promises the disciples as he sends them out to cast out demons, that they will also be accused of being in league with the devil. When they heal the sick, give sight to the blind, cure the lame, the deaf, the mute, when they cast out demons, the world around them is going to tell them it is by the prince of demons that you cast them out. They are going to be accused of being just like Jesus.

When we point out to the world that their sin causes spiritual and physical death and indicate that the solution is repentance and freedom in Christ Jesus, we are accused of being in league with the devil. When people say that society has changed and that the sexual revolution has allowed us to see things for what they really are; that a man isn't a man and a woman isn't a woman, that two men can be married that two women can be married, that children born out of wedlock are not disadvantaged, and we contradict them and say, no, this is not God's will, we are accused of being evil. Whenever you are called bigoted or misogynistic or being part of the patriarchy that person is saying that 'I think your views are evil, you are in league with the devil'. Therefore, if you consider the list I gave to you two weeks ago of the ills of the world, we are not supposed to take them on board and agree with the world. We are supposed to point out the world's errors and the ills the world brings upon itself, in the hope that the people of the world might repent of their sin and receive Christ's forgiveness also. When we refuse to stand up for God's view on marriage and sexuality (various other topics that are unsavoury in our society) because we fear being ostracised or called evil by our society, we are succumbing to the persecution. We are fearing how we are viewed in the world more than we fear love and trust God.

The disciples are also told that they should not fear bodily destruction over and above fearing God. When Jesus sends them out, he promises them that they are going to be dragged before kings and emperors, whipped and beaten, but they should not fear this. They should not fear this because they are valuable in the eyes of God. When we fear death because of the pain and suffering that it brings and then curb our proclamation of God's law and his gospel, we have succumbed to this fear. When we allow our fear of suffering and death to overcome us (yes earthly death is painful), we forget that we have already died and risen to new life in baptism and that we are immensely valuable to God. We are sinning against the first commandment as we fail to fear love and trust in the one true God. When this fear affects our actions and decisions, sin prevails.

Along with all this Jesus also promises that families will be torn asunder because of the Christian faith. A mother against daughter, son against father, mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother and sister at war. We are going to be at war with our loved ones because of the faith. We are inclined to fear losing these loved ones and so we temper

our words and change our actions so that we can maintain earthly peace. No one wants arguments at the Christmas dinner table, we want to see our grandchildren and our children, we want peace and harmony in our families.

When we don't speak out to our children, we are in fact allowing them to persecute us. For when they leave the church, and you know in your families how your children and grandchildren have left the church, they are by their actions (their lack of attendance) both confessing where their true faith is and denying your faith. They are persecuting you. Granted, low level persecution, but they are persecuting you by leaving the faith. When you have taught them the creed, the commandments, the Lord's prayer, the benefits of baptism, when you have brought them to God's house so they can receive his gifts and they reject the faith by their actions, they are in fact persecuting you by removing themselves from the faith. This is exactly what Jesus is describing to his disciples as he sends them out on their preaching rounds. We have succumbed to the fear of losing our families on this earth and instead we have in some cases lost them for eternity, even though we hope, pray, wish, and want for them to still have faith, if they have removed themselves from receiving God's gifts how can he sustain their faith? Jesus doesn't give us three categories; of faithful, neutral and against the faith, he gives us two categories; those who are for him and those who are against.

All these things are persecutions and fears that we have that become greater fears than our fear, love, and trust of God and so they have become our idols. We need to confess these sins so that we can bask in Christ's forgiveness who has buried those sins, who has suffered on the cross and born those sins for you, taking them into the grave and destroying them in his new life and so that we can live in this freedom and forgiveness.

Baptism, that is death and resurrection through union with Jesus, puts our fears into perspective. United with Jesus we are free to confess both our faith and sin, free to live with Christ because we have already died and risen with him.

Amen

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding, keep our hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen