

The Rev. Christopher Adams
November 5, 2023 (10am)

A Conspiracy of Grace (10am)

Beloved in Christ...this is the day that we have so desperately needed. And not just we who have gathered in this beautiful space, but the whole world, too. For not all spaces are as beautiful as this...not all lives are as rich as ours...not all faces wear the upturned smiles of joy. The specter of despair looms largely over the world. Beauty stands threatened by the ugliness of depravity...the richness of some births the poverty of others...and those upturned smiles of joy feel a weight that might just break them into frowns. But not today. Today, we're pushing back against the darkness, choosing to be candles that illuminate rather than simply cursing the darkness that remains. Today, we'll pray, sing, laugh, because today is the day that Bodie Johnston goes into the cool, crisp waters of baptism, is welcomed into the loving arms of Jesus, and returns to us as a reminder that God is still at work in this world.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. Testifying to this truth is what we will soon witness, when those waters wash over Bodie's head and we see grace come to life, grace in action, grace made real and visible. John's words to us this morning don't live only in a distant past, but they come to life right before our very eyes. And to think Bodie's baptism is taking place on today of all days, All Saints' Day, a day when we celebrate the wondrous saints of old who have paved the way for our own lives of discipleship. But at its core, to be washed in the waters of baptism and to be claimed as Christ's own forever...well, that's really what it means to be a saint, anyhow. To be redeemed by Christ, made alive by Christ, to get caught up in his mission of transforming the world. We are witnessing the birth of a saint among us, and we are the lucky ones for it!

And this joy can carry us when the days seem darkened by anguish and despair. When it feels like hope for a brighter future is lost, when it feels like our wheels are spinning out as we try to pursue the mission of the Gospel, when *those* feelings come, we turn back to a moment like this, when we saw the faces of overjoyed parents and the smile of a child whose goodness is yet untouched by the world. We turn back to this moment and remember that the Gospel is still bringing people to life, that the Church is an oasis of love where all are invited to meet God, and that the Holy Spirit isn't done with us just yet! 200 years strong, and 200 more!

The story of the saints of old is Bodie's story, and it's ours too. In the midst of a harsh world, we dare to believe that goodness and beauty can have the final word. We dare to believe that the goodness on display this morning is a goodness the whole world needs to see and experience. And this impulse is wrapped up in our new mission statement: *The mission of St. Peter's Episcopal Church is to reflect the love of Jesus Christ by affirming and welcoming all to meet God in an oasis of love, responding to the needs of our community and healing the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.* At the center of our Stewardship Campaign stands this mission statement. It captures what we hope and believe not just about the present, but the future too. And sometimes campaigns like these end up feeling stale, or disconnected from reality. But not today. Today we see our mission come to life, as we witness Bodie Johnston meet God in the oasis of baptism. We see the triumph of grace in a world that has forgotten what grace even looks like. This is the good work of the Gospel, and this is why we give. So people can still taste and see of the goodness of God for centuries to come.

That goodness of God, that hope, is incarnate here, in this place, on this day. Because right before our very eyes, as he experiences the luminous waters of baptism, Bodie will be reborn as something more than Frank and Besty's son. The waters will receive him as he is, and

return him to us as one who was buried with Christ in his death...as one who shares in his resurrection. The joy that he brings to us all, especially to Betsy and Frank, will now be coupled with all of the promise and prophetic power of the Risen Christ. Yes, we will meet Christ upon the altar, in the sweetness of bread and wine, but we will first meet him anew in the smiles and coos of this beautiful baby boy. We will first meet Christ as we gather around this child and are reminded that even in the darkest of times and most desperate of hours, God is calling forth signs of life, true life...life so abundant, so vibrant, so wonderful.

This is why we will pray, and sing, and laugh...because this little boy becomes a sacrament for us all...a sign that we are not left alone...that we are not forgotten...that the tomb lost its power all those years ago...that life prevails. Christ once stood in a room full of doubters and cynics, and offered them his flesh and bones. He does this again, today...but his body is not that of a grown man asking for a piece of fish. His body is that of a little child, wriggling in his mother's arms, grasping for his father's nose, knowing their love and returning it all the same. The hope of the Resurrection is born anew this day, born anew in our midst, and though he doesn't yet know it, Bodie Johnston is precisely who we all needed today. To Betsy and Frank, thank you for sharing him with us today, and entrusting him into the arms of God, and allowing us to play some part in this wondrous moment. Your boy gives us all hope, because in him we will meet Jesus. Happy Baptism Day, Happy All Saints Sunday, Happy Consecration Sunday...what a day to be alive and here at St. Peter's. Let the richness of this day wash over you, and grip you, so that you leave here changed by the obscene amount of grace on display!