

**Warm-up**

My first church-job after completing seminary was at the head office of the former ELCC in Saskatoon. I was Editorial Assistant, working under Rev. Oscar Sommerfeld, the executive head of the Division of Communications of the church. Pastor Sommerfeld was a distinguished man not only in knowledge and pastoral wisdom, but also in appearance. He stood just a bit over 6 feet, and had a leonine head of salt-and-pepper hair. Even though I didn't always agree with him theologically, I had a great deal of respect for him.

One day, at morning coffee time in the head office, one of the former female staff people came to show off her new baby. She brought the infant into the coffee room so that we could all see. Once all the female staff had their chance to "ooh-and-ahh," Pastor Sommerfeld got up, walked over to mother and babe, and then tickled the baby under the chin, with the words, "kootchy-kootchy-koo."

I almost rubbed my eyes in disbelief at the spectacle! It seemed so out of character for my boss.

What effect does a baby have upon us? Why is God saying to us by sending us the Saviour first of all as a helpless infant? What does it mean to receive God's reign over us as we might receive a child thrust into our midst?

**Pulpit**

Discipleship with Jesus is a life of surprise. That's what the original followers of Jesus are discovering. In today's gospel lesson, Jesus is telling them of the necessity of *Baby Faith*. I wonder if they had any idea of Baby Faith when Jesus first called them.

Actually, getting called by Jesus was the first surprise. The long-standing tradition among the Chosen People of God in ancient times was for a prospective or "wanna-be" follower to approach a notable rabbi or teacher,

and apply for discipleship. The initiative had to be taken by the prospective follower. And there was no guarantee that the teacher would grant the request and take on the prospect as a disciple.

But look what Jesus does: *he* takes the initiative. Jesus goes out into the streets and roads and onto the seashore, and calls people to follow. That happened with the original disciples 2,000 years ago and it's still happening today. God's Spirit moves among us. For just as God-in-Christ wanted followers back then, God-in-Christ wants followers today. God wants you and me to follow. God wants you and me to live by faith.

Following Jesus is just as surprising today as it ever was. When we are faithful, we will minister Word and Sacrament to anyone and everyone. We gleefully baptize and commune all kinds of people who gather with us to hear the Good News of God in Jesus Christ ... including children. Even babies who have virtually no intellectual comprehension. For we believe that God can and will accomplish what God promises, regardless of *our* capacities and abilities. So God can create faith even in children — yes, even in babies! And God can create and sustain faith even in you and me. *Baby Faith.*

But we protest. That's not sensible. Such a doctrine or teaching is not reasonable. You can't see the results, you can't measure them, you can't show evidence for them.

Besides, it offends us personally. We have sacrificed so much already in our years of faithfulness, and we figure *that has to count for something*. We want someone, someplace, to chalk it up in our spiritual account. In any plan for salvation we want room for our volition, our notion of personal autonomy and free will, and the power to make decisions.

Well, I guess we're in good company. Listen again to part of our gospel lesson for today.

Then they (that is, Jesus and his disciples) came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

I wonder how their argument went. What kinds of things did they bring up? Just what criteria would you consider in order to assess who is the greatest?

The real question, however, is this: *Why are they asking at all?* Jesus has just informed them of the path that his life would inevitably take, because in his person God had come too close to humankind on terms that humankind doesn't want: "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into the human hands, and they will kill him, and three days later after being killed, he will rise again."

Why are they asking this at all? St. Mark tells us that they did not understand what he was saying, and they were afraid to ask.

So Jesus sat down, and called the Twelve, and said to them: "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all ... and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Baby faith! God surprises us yet again! God comes among us as a child — harmless, helpless, disarming us, calling forth tenderness and wonder. God charms us, melts our hearts, and opens our minds to playful possibilities. God turns the world upside down!

The World-made-flesh was born of a young peasant woman, Mary of Nazareth, and came into our world just like you and me — as a baby.

God surprises us with baby faith. God gives us new vision for a life together where we cherish one another precisely because, in the person of Jesus Christ, God comes among us like a child. Through the Holy Spirit, God empowers us to welcome Jesus. And because we welcome Jesus, we welcome the one who sent him, the Creator and Lord of all.

May God grant you Baby Faith. May God create us anew for life together. May God's grant that we may cherish one another and respect and care for the world that God has made.