

Today [at 10:30] we have the honor of baptizing young Charlie Taylor.

From this day on, Charlie will be fully a part of Christ's body

- The Church - before he knows any other way of being.

I've been wondering what KIND of life awaits him.

What will Charlie Taylor's life in Christ look like?

Looking globally, it's a mixed bag.

On one hand we pray he will never be a victim of any
of the horrors that come upon the world from time to time,
horrors like the starvation inflicted on the people of Gaza,
horrors like the hundreds of thousands dead in Nigeria
from violence and instability in recent years,
a death toll that dwarfs the wars in Ukraine and Gaza combined¹
and yet one we hear almost nothing about.

We should pray also that he will never be victimized for his faith,
like over 40 Christians of all ages were two weeks ago
in the Congo when they were massacred
in the middle of the night during their prayer vigil,²
or like the village of Taybeh (Tie-Bay) in the West Bank,
where Israeli settlers tried to set fire to the last remaining
majority-Christian village in the area³.

¹ <https://livingchurch.org/news/news-anglican-communion/nigerians-plead-for-an-end-to-rampant-murder/>

² <https://livingchurch.org/news/news-anglican-communion/rebels-slaughter-40-catholics-in-a-congo-church/>

³ <https://livingchurch.org/news/news-anglican-communion/holy-land-leaders-call-for-action-over-attacks-on-west-bank-christians/>

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Those horrors paint a frightening picture,
but actually, around the world as a whole life IS improving.

A recent Gallup poll of people living in 142 countries
said that the number of people across the world
who say their lives are thriving
has been rising for a decade now,
while the number of people who say they are suffering
is as low as it's been in almost 20 years.
Thanks be to God for this good news.⁴

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If you zoom in to America, though, the trends are less hopeful.
Even though our economic well-being
is among the highest in the world,
that same poll showed that our satisfaction with our lives
is dropping year after year.⁵

And, we are finally starting to realize
what a difficult time it is to be a young male in America,
even a young male like Charlie
with loving parents and grandparents,
even a young male with economic opportunity and
access to education and health care.

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/07/opinion/happiness-community-wealth.html>

⁵ *ibid.*

Graduation and employment rates are falling fast for young men,
while mental health problems and suicide rates are surging.
And shooting attacks like the one at the CDC this week
always seem to involve sick, confused young men.

Statistically, Charlie and a lot of young boys and men
face challenges we don't even understand yet,
much less know how to address.

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The thing to remember in all this is that no one lives a statistical life.

We each have our own journey,
each of us influenced by outside forces but not enslaved to them.
Each person's journey remains uniquely his own,
and Charlie's will be no different.

He will face the challenges and receive the blessings of his time
but what that will look like for him is known only to God.

"The Lord looks down from heaven,"
the psalm tells us this morning,
"He sees all mankind."

And the One who fashioned the heart
of this newest member of Christ's body
is the ONLY one who will ever truly see him in full.

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One of the great blessings of priesthood,
especially parish priesthood,
is we get to be the keeper not of statistics, but of stories.

We get invited into important life moments, like baptisms!
and if we are very lucky,
we also get invited into people's inner lives,
into the private triumphs and tragedies and mysteries
of your lives with Christ.

The story of what it was like to have polio as a child.
Or the story of the child who wet the bed until middle school,
but how that embarrassing secret made her
more empathetic to the insecurity of others.

The longing some feel for loved ones who have died before you,
and the conflicted feelings others hold for their departed.

The rising and falling and falling deeper and rising again
of a parent's heart as their children
go through the ups and downs AND UPS AND DOWNS
AND UPS AND DOWNS...of life.

It is a profound privilege to be invited into your lives,
and if we shepherds are paying attention,
it teaches us to see each person as unique,
each person as truly created in God's image.

It teaches us that even in a community that seems

as homogenous as Holy Trinity,

there is still an infinite diversity of life.

Some of the wounds are visible.

Some of the stories are public. Most of them are not.

It can be amusing or heartbreaking or even overwhelming sometimes

to watch when we gather over coffee, in a classroom,

at today's picnic, and to see the hidden currents of our lives

at play in what look like ordinary conversations.

The small glimpses I've been privileged to see as one of your priests

has taught me a humility I didn't have before,

has taught me to withhold judgment on who here is successful,

who here is righteous, who here is good.

Charlie - sooner than we realize, sooner than we want -

will be cast into this same scary, thrilling, roller coaster of life.

He will face the same challenges, temptations, and attacks.

He will receive the same blessings, lessons, and comforts.

His inner life will be a mystery to those who love him,

and no matter how many protections we give him,

he will face life...and the living of it.

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So, what difference will Jesus make for Charlie

as he moves through this strange, new world?

Let me suggest two ways.

The first way is profound. The second way... is Everything.

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The profound difference for Charlie

is to be raised in what scripture causes the Fear of the Lord.

Fear doesn't mean terror, or fright. It means awe. It means,

“O Lord, my God / when I in awesome wonder,
consider all the worlds Thy hands have made....”

THAT is the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is profound because

it means knowing that reality is no accident,

that the world you move in was created by a loving God.

It means knowing that YOU are no accident,

that you were created by a loving God.

And it means knowing that even on your worst day,

you are loved completely & known fully by that same God.

The Fear of the Lord will change your perspective on life, if you let it.

“When I am afraid,” Psalm 56 says,

“I will put my trust in you.”

“In God, whose word I praise,

in God I trust and will not be afraid,

for what can flesh do to me?”

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The fear of the Lord is the beginning of true wisdom,
but there is more. So, so much more.

Because the Christian faith is more than perspective.
More than trust. More than fear or awe.

The Christian faith is Salvation.

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Charlie's parents and godparents are making a vow this day
to teach him that his life has already been saved.

That whatever sins or failings he commits,
whatever fears or betrayals or wounds he bears,
his life has already been transformed into new life by Jesus,
by the One who took on Charlie's broken humanity
and the broken humanity of the whole world.

The One who took on that human flesh
lived the same human triumphs & losses & mysteries we all do,
and by then offering himself as a sacrifice for us all,
he transformed our broken humanity
into a redeemed humanity, into a resurrected life.

Our prayer is that Charlie will come to believe
what the rest of us here are all learning to believe ourselves:
that not only do we die in Christ,
but that we are already reborn into new life with Christ.

He won't have to be brave.

He won't have to be perfect.

He won't have to earn his salvation.

Because it's not about him, just like it's not about you or me.

It's about Jesus. Always about Jesus. Now and forever.

Amen.