

The Baptism of Nevaeh Guillerey Chambliss
Hope Central Church
Pentecost 19, Saturday, 11/25/14
The Rev. Laura Ruth Jarrett

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after dismissing the crowds, Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the sea. But when they saw walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when Peter noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out and caught Peter, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped Jesus, saying, 'Truly you are the Child of God.'

Matthew 14: 22-33

Where were you on Wednesday during that nor'easter, then the wind was high and the rain was coming down in sheets? I was on retreat all day, and I stood at the great tall window of my mentor's house on and watched as the wild wind whipped white caps of water on the surface of the lake there on the North Shore, and thought of Arrington and Hez's search for the child that is theirs. For seven years, they looked for their child, and for 5 years, she was not to be found. The suddenly, there she was, Nevaeh, heaven spelled backwards, and suddenly Arrington and Hez were mothers.

I don't know if you know of their despair of those five years, and the uncertainty of the next two years, until Nevaeh and Hez and Arrington, and so many others, Tina, Lucas, Jack, Jane O because family forever. It was a stormy time, and sometimes, before Nevaeh come to them, they thought they were lost on the sea, alone.

This too may have been Neveah's life before she got to Arrington and Hez, a stormy sea with no shore in sight.

So it is in our lives, the waves roll and the wind whips, and we are always wanting to have a foot in the boat of certainty or suffering and a foot out with

Jesus. In or out - what will it be? And what will it be - walking on water or sinking down, sinking down, when I was sinking down.

Hear the gospel accord to David Whyte

The Truelove

There is a faith in loving fiercely
the one who is rightfully yours
especially if you have
waited years and especially
if part of you never believed
you could deserve this
loved and beckoning hand
held out to you this way.

I am thinking of faith now
and the testaments of loneliness
and what we feel we are
worthy of in this world.

Years ago in the Hebrides
I remember an old man
who walked every morning
on the grey stones
to the shore of baying seals

who would press his hat
to his chest in the blustering
salt wind and say his prayer
to the turbulent Jesus
hidden in the water

and I think of the story
of the storm and everyone
waking and seeing
the distant
yet familiar figure
far across the water
calling to them

and how we are all
preparing for that
abrupt waking,
and that calling,
and that moment

we have to say yes,
except it will
not come so grandly
so Biblically
but more subtly
and intimately in the face
of the one you know
you have to love

so that when
we finally step out of the boat
toward them, we find
everything holds
us, and everything confirms
our courage, and if you wanted
to drown you could,
but you don't
because finally
after all this struggle
and all these years
you don't want to any more
you've simply had enough
of drowning
and you want to live and you
want to love and you will
walk across any territory
and any darkness
however fluid and however
dangerous to take the
one hand you know
belongs in yours.

-- David Whyte
from *The House of Belonging*
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Arrington and Hez these seven years have not drown, refused to drown. They made the journey across that territory of raging water and darkness to open their hands to receive the gift of faith, and I mean not only the gift of Nevaeh, but also the gift of the opportunity to hold the hand of Jesus that is the presence of Nevaeh.

They do so love Nevaeh that they wrote love letters to her.

This is the practice of our congregation, when a child is being baptized, to read the love letters of the parents to their beloved children. We lucky witnesses get to listen and know these letters as if they were also love letters to us from the Divine - the most tender manifestation of God for her people. Hear these words as if they were intended not only for Nevaeh, but also for you.

Hez writes:

Nevaeh,

We have been waiting for you for 7 years. Our journey to you was a long one, and for our journey to bring us to you is the most amazing gift. Because you, after all this time, are the one that we have been waiting for. I have no doubt that God found us you.

When we met you at two years old, what you said to us with all of your small, smart and powerful self was this: I am here. I am not to be ignored. I am to be listened to and loved. I am here. I heard you and you immediately jumped into my heart.

You are here, I see you, and you are adored. What I know about you is this: you are light, you are determined, you are brave, and you are kind. You notice the world and its beauty around you, from the birch trees to your favorite, the snails. You have a sense of awe and wonder that is beautiful. You embody joy.

The promises I make to you:

I will listen to you, again and again. Even when I think I heard what you have said or if what you are telling me is without words, I will listen more. I will find your beautiful eyes, and I will listen.

I will play with you, dance with you, scream with you, and wrestle with you. I will hold you and help to remind you that you can be gentle with your self, stop when you get hurt, and feel what you feel.

I will support you to find God in whatever way you need to, in whatever path you take on your spiritual journey.

What I want to you know is that you are beloved. You have been since the moment you were born, and you always will be. Mama and I are so lucky to be your parents – we are delighted to be your parents. You teach us how to be present, how to love with all our hearts, and of course, how to climb anything we see and dance.

Your first year with us, the words I sang to as you fell asleep were: Mama and I will always love you, we will always be with you, we will always keep you safe. You are loved, loved, loved.

Sweet Nevaeh Guillerey Chambliss, you are here. And you are so loved.

I love you to the moon and back 500 trillion times.

Mom-Hez

And this from Arrington:

My Beloved Nevaeh,

Thank you, my love, for being my daughter. I get to be your mama! What an overwhelming privilege... and I love being your mama every day even when I am short, tired or frustrated. You, my beloved girl, are extraordinary. You are kind. You are smart. You are strong. When you enter a room it fills with light and aliveness. You astound on the playground with your crossing of the monkey bars backwards and forwards six times and climbing poles. You are an incredible and bold artist. I love watching you quickly apply paint to a piece of paper in big confident strokes transforming the page to a Princess, a house, or some fantastic scene with words that you made up to describe the images direct from your incredibly creative soul. You are compassionate, especially when someone is sad or needs a bandaid or a butterfly ice pack.

Nevaeh Guillerey Chambliss, I carry your heart in my heart not just when we are together. I have to hold myself back all the time from telling stories about you because spilling over with delight to share that with anybody. I love who you are.

I want you to know that this world is filled with so much beauty and wonder and love and possibility. And if you grow eyes to see it; it is always there. And yet some times people can be mean and forget who they are or that God made them to love one another. My prayers for you are that you will always know your belovedness and singularity of essence. And that when you get confused about your belovedness, my love, which I am so sad to say, but you sometimes will, then I pray, you can remember that you belong... to a family, to a community, to yourself, to God. And this love is always there abiding... And on those days when love is hard to reach I pray you find your way back into your place among things by climbing, running or drawing, or swimming in the tub and holding your breath under the pink bubbles or maybe singing or maybe even one day meditating or praying.

I pray you will you will revel in being a strong girl and yet will know that being a strong girl does not mean that you always have to be strong and that it's ok to cry, rant, rage get angry, and feel puny.

I pray when Mom Hez and I make mistakes, I pray you will tell us, and when you are ready, forgive us and I pray that you will also forgive yourself because all of

us make mistakes. I pray that you will know God through - our love; and your spiritual/church community's love; and also see love through the incredible day's end light we can see from the front porch at sunset; and in your breath and in coming home to yourself.

Finally, I pray this day of Baptism will be in your memory forever... calling you back to your belovedness as a daughter of God and our daughter.

"My beloved daughter", Nevaeh Guillerey Chambliss.

I love you to the moon and back 10,000 times (and more),

Mama Arrington

This is the word of truth. **Thanks be to God.**