

Perfectly Imperfect!

[Text -Ephesians 4:1-7]

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Holy Baptism is a beautiful reminder of the interconnectedness of the Human Family. It also offers us an opportunity to acknowledge our own peculiar family backgrounds, and our less-than-perfect selves. The fact is, that we are *a//*flawed human beings! Yet Baptism affirms that each of us is imprinted with a Divine image and likeness, which is absolutely flawless! Every person on earth is bestowed with particular strengths and weaknesses, abilities and disabilities, gifts and glitches which makes that person unique. So perhaps one of the greatest gift you and I can offer to each other - and to our Divine Source - is the gift of our authentic selves. Jesus says we shouldn't hide our light under a basket, but rather let it shine-forth for all to see! What often keeps us from doing this, is the fear that when we put ourselves out there, our flaws and frailties will also brightly shine-forth. And this is where the Sacrament of Holy Baptism can instruct and help us.

In Baptism, you and I acknowledge our dependence on Divine *Grace* to redeem and sustain us. We admit that we can't make it on our own. We need to connect with our Holy Source; and we also need a connection to a supportive and compassionate Family of Faith. And when you and I truly embrace our Baptism - which embraces *us* with the perfect love of our Heavenly Parent - we can then let go of the fears and self-doubt that keeps us from living fully and freely as children of the Holy One. With the Presence and power of the Holy Spirit, you and I - as the Body of Christ - can grow together into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ - the Compassionate One who welcomes and embraces *a//*people with Life-changing Love.

One of the beautiful things about a baptism in this church, is that it truly is a community event. In addition to Leila's biological family, she - and each person baptized here - connects to a much larger family: the Brecksville United Church of Christ, and the

world-wide Body of Christ. Within this inclusive and extended family, every child can receive nurture, support, and encouragement as she or he develops and matures. And you and I have the wonderful opportunity of watching these children grow in faith, and *grow-up* right before our eyes!

This morning I believe that I heard everyone here promise Leila and her family their “prayerful support, as they seek to live-out Christ’s love!” And while I won’t argue the legality of that pledge, I do hold each of you - and myself - accountable to the essential spirit of that Promise. We owe it to our children, and to *all children*, to provide and cultivate a safe and sacred environment in which we can all grow and thrive together. This means that we will not only support and care for our *Church* Home, but that we will also take better care of our *Earthly* Home.

As a father and grandfather, uncle and [according to my nieces’ and nephews’ children] a *great* uncle, I’m concerned about the legacy we leave to future generations. For although Divine Love and Grace *is* limitless, our natural resources - and our earth’s ability to repair itself - are not. Therefore, we must increase our efforts to decrease the damage and the wastefulness that takes place all around us. It’s the least we can do for these little ones that we love. But in addition to providing a wholesome physical environment, we also must provide a wholesome message and a supportive community where God’s Children of all ages can develop a positive mind-set and a healthy self-image.

In this morning’s Continuing Testament Henri Nouwen talks about “the great trap of self-rejection” which is created by the “loud and persistent negative voices” that surround us. Of course Nouwen wrote these words some 25 years ago, long before the unrelenting, in-your-face-book kind of social media attacks. And while social media can be used to connect, enlighten, and lift-up people, it’s often used to divide, confuse and tear people down. Those ‘negative voices that call us worthless, ugly and unlovable’ have found a new and expansive platform; which is why it is crucial that you and I, as people of faith, provide a positive, expansive and Life-affirming alternative. That we consistently proclaim through

our words - and our actions - the abundant and overflowing love that our Heavenly Parent has for each and every child.

The write of Ephesians puts it this way: "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

In today's often toxic and divisive surroundings, staying positive and patient, compassionate and caring isn't an easy thing to do. Fortunately, as this morning's celebration reassures us, we don't have to do it alone. The Holy One is with us, around us, and within us! And just as Leila is embraced and surrounded by the love of her family, her extended family, and her Divine Source, so are each one of us - on this day, and every day of our lives!