

I was born on Labor Day, and my mother likes to tell me how hard she labored that day. But as the Letter of James tells us and the sacrament of baptism reminds us, while our mothers work hard to bring us to birth, God is the one who brings us to life. That’s because God is the one who gives us our spiritual birth, “by the word of truth” as James puts it. As we are being knit in our mother’s wombs, intricately woven in the depths of the earth, (Psalm 139), at some point the Holy Spirit breathes into us the breath of life and whispers into us the word of truth.

That word is love. Love is the all-encompassing truth that the Spirit planted in our souls. And since love is God, then we are firmly rooted in the oneness, wholeness, undefiled beauty and fundamental goodness of God. This is what our true self looks like. In baptism we name it. But in life, we struggle hard to claim it.

Our true self can be pretty shy. It likes to hide in the underbrush. But even if we can’t see it, we can be assured that we

can't really lose it, either. The world will try to convince us otherwise. All kinds of people and problems will try to take it away from us. But the fact is that God doesn't lose anything. What God made, God will save.

So, parents, listen up. Liza, Brad, I know you love your son. You've given him a lot of wonderful things. For starters, you gave him a great name. The world could use another Lincoln or two right now. Beyond that, you are giving him a loving home, good food, access to health care and brain-stimulating activities. And while you are fully engaged in whatever developmental phase he's in right now, I know that you are already making plans for his higher education, and I'm not just talking about college. For Lincoln, you have set your sights even higher. By bringing him for baptism today, you are showing us that you are making plans for his soul formation as well.

That's wise because there is something you cannot give him, no matter how much you love him, no matter how hard you work,

how carefully you plan, and how diligently you save. You can save your energy, because it is something that has already been given to him. With absolutely no effort on your part, the divine life has been implanted in him. Baptism is our way of recognizing that God has already given Lincoln everything he needs to be all that God created him to be. Your job is just to help him discover this truth and to help him hold onto it for dear life.

Babies are all about truth. They don't know how to live any other way. But as they grow, as they make their way in a broken world that is, in many ways, a false world, there's a very real danger that they will forget their true self. That can happen when baptism is just a certificate you have rather than a gift you use.

Susan makes these wonderful shells, keepsakes with the child's name and date of baptism on it. But we don't want baptism to be a keepsake, just another memory that you put in a box and store on a shelf. We want that shell to be a visible reminder of an invisible gift. And whenever he sees it, we want it to prompt his to use this

incredible blessing. James tells us that God brought us to birth by a word of truth. But then he warns us not to be hearers of this truth only. We must be doers.

So when I say, “Remember your baptism,” I’m not just taking you down memory lane. I’m saying: first, you need to reject all that is false in you and all that is false around you. You need to reject all the sin that every day we get enmeshed in. You need to do that so you can embrace the grace and finally see and celebrate your true self. Then give thanks to the God for giving birth to you by acting on God’s truth in your life and advocating for God’s truth in your world.

If we are going to be doers of the word, we should really ask, “what would Jesus *do*?” The letter of James says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Let’s begin with the bit about the world. James knows that it’s pretty hard to be your true self when you have to live in a false

world, a world that doesn't look anything like the God who made it. In a false world, there is lots of fake news. When hear it, remember that you have the word of truth. So stand up and speak loud and protect that truth with your life. Likewise, when the world brings you bad news, don't run and hide from it, but don't you ever surrender to it. Remember that we have been entrusted with the Good News. Shame on us when we don't share it. When the world gives you ugly, and it shovels it daily, give it some beauty. When the world gives in to injustice, give it some Jesus. And when people peddle hatred, when you start to feel the toxic effects of their fear—show them his radical boundary-crossing, wall-breaking love. The world really needs you, your country needs you, your family needs you to be doers of God's implanted word. So come hell or high water, keep following Jesus all the way to his kingdom.

James says that religion is worthless if it is just words. In the same way, baptism is meaningless if it is just a certificate and not a total life commitment. We have to make it every day. I came home

from Steve Quigley's service yesterday thinking: this is a life we can't wait to live on some other day. Because you and I might not have another day. So remember your baptism and be your true self today.

After church, you can sign up to care for the widows and orphans. "Widows and orphans" is Bible shorthand for the most vulnerable among us. In our case, they are the medically fragile women of Village House. Over the next several weeks, they'll give you ample opportunity not only to remember but to live your baptism and to be doers of the word that has the power to save souls, yours and theirs. For Lincoln and for all baptized Christians, every day is Labor Day. Christians of the world, unite!