**Baptism vows**

*Invite parents to bring child to the front*

1. Nathan and Alison, do you come freely this morning, desiring that your daughter, Anna Croad be baptised?

2. As you come this morning, do you publicly commit to being responsible and loving parents towards Anna, remaining faithful to her whatever the future may bring, respecting her wherever she may go, and remembering always that she is a child of God?

3. Do you confess your belief in God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and as parents do you look to Jesus Christ, seeking to live in his ways, demonstrating his grace and showing his love, in the situations life brings?

*Invite God-parent to come forward*

As the name indicates, God-parents have a role in the sacrament of baptism and in helping raise this child to know what Christianity is about, and to hear the call of God on their life, so this vow is for all of you.

4. In presenting this child for baptism, do you commit to helping see Anna brought up within the fellowship of the Christian Church, and raising her with a knowledge of the Christian faith as expressed in both word and deed?

**To the church children (if they are there)**

‘Do you, the children of this church, promise to be Anna’s brothers and sisters in our church family? Will you try to remember her name and greet her when you see her? Will you include her in your games and help her learn about Jesus?’

**Congregational vows**

*Invite the congregation to stand*

1. Do you, representing the church here, receive Anna in the name of Christ?

**Yes, we do.**

2. Will you surround her and her family with love, and look for ways of being Christ to them?

**Yes, we will.**

3. And will you commit to support Alison and Nathan as they strive to have Anna raised with a knowledge of God.

**Yes, we will.**

**Sermon Feb 19th 2017 – John 15:9-17**

So John 15 and a meditation by Jesus on love and friendship. Some familiar bits in it eh? A summary of Jesus’ words…

- “As the Father has loved me, *so have I loved you*. So now… you lot… *remain* in my love!

- If you keep my ***commands***, you *will* remain in my love

- And *my command is this*: Love one another as I have loved you.

- Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

- And *you are my friends* if you do what I command.

- You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit

- (and Jesus concludes by repeating and reinforcing the central point and the fruit he is after) This is my command: **Love one another**!

*Turn to your neighbour and have a chat… what stands out for you from that?*

Jesus is telling us that God has a big new command for us! And this command is that we love each other… Jesus goes on to say that God wants to be our friends, and if we obey his commandment and love each other, then we *are* God’s friends…

What though does it mean to be a friend? The highest form of friendship is to love someone so much that we would be willing to lay down our life for that person…

God therefore proved his friendship and love to us by laying down his life for us, as Jesus Christ, on the cross.

*Feedback…*

Thinking back to the beginning of Christianity in the Roman Empire, how do you imagine this message would’ve sounded? Familiarity might make this sound a bit ho-hum to us, but back in the day this would’ve been both very weird and very revolutionary to people. This was big stuff!

But, now for something completely different…

Knitting!

I love the knitting out the front of the church, and I have to say that reminds me of Dr Seuss… and baptising Anna today reminded me in particular of what I believe is the last book Dr Seuss’ wrote just before he died “***Oh the Places you’ll Go***” *(anyone know that one?)* – for Anna’s whole life lies before her, adventure awaits! Oh the places she will go.

So, sit back and let’s listen to Dr Seuss…

*Oh the places you’ll go… https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoyVcIMdcL4*

It’s quite profoundly true that book isn’t it? Oh the places you’ll go! Life is actually quite a lot like that.

We can try to use this book as a metaphor for the spiritual life too, for as we know, **faith is a journey**! The life of faith is one of movement and change and discovery. The Christian life is one of ever pressing on to learn more about God, more about ourselves, and to be conformed more and more into the likeness of Christ - allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us and change us.

Like in the book, on the journey of faith we have good times and bad times; we have our mountain top moments of glory and clarity, but we also must pass through the valley of the shadow of death from time to time.

And with that, our faith teaches that we are *beloved* and made in the image of God, but that we are also *broken* and tend to mess things up a bit. So sometimes we’ll choose paths that lead to life, but sometimes we’ll choose paths that lead to death…

We’ll take the wrong paths and go to dark places sometimes. If that happens we need to be honest with ourselves that we got it wrong – we made a bad choice, we need to ***repent***, we need to change our thinking, we need to reverse up, centre ourselves again on the cross, and get back on track.

For the Bible it tells us that we are **strangers and pilgrims** on this earth, seeking a homeland…

We have seen this homeland in the distance with the eyes of faith – a land where God’s Kingdom has come and God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven – and so we stay faithful and keep hope, we keep pressing forward, ever closer.

Accordingly, we are wary of that waiting place…

Sure, a lot of our faith is waiting. We are given a vision, and we need patience to see that vision come to pass. But, it isn’t a passive patience, the patience of sitting around bored in the doctor’s surgery waiting for our name to be called.

No! Our waiting is the active patience of a marathon runner – running the race, sticking it through, waiting and yearning and enduring, to finally get to the finishing line, the promised goal.

And our waiting ***is a waiting that looks forward, not backward***.

We aren’t waiting for a saviour to come and take us back in time to a point when things were better than they are today. We are waiting for what lies ahead, God’s coming Kingdom that will upend and transform our world.

What lies ahead is better than anything that lies behind.

But anyway, that’s what I think this book gets right if we desire to use it as a metaphor for the journey of faith.

However, it’s a kids book! It wasn’t written as a metaphor for the spiritual life, and so therefore things are missing from the story if we try to do read it this way.

*So turn to your neighbour… thinking of John 15, chat about what might be missing from this book if we want to use it as a picture of the journey of faith?*

Obviously God doesn’t feature in this book, though you could imagine that the narrator is God, urging us on; today urging Anna on! On from our baptism and our inclusion in the people of God, and out into the exciting journey of faith…

But, what about the place of **other people**?

Sure, everyone has to walk their own journey through life. It is our path and no-one else can walk it for us! But, we don’t have to walk it alone.

In the book, where are this guy’s friends? How is he showing love and receiving love? There are other people in the story but they are there to race against and get ahead of in the hot air balloons; and they are there to score points against and beat live on TV.

This book does sum up an attitude in our culture that we are man alone (or woman alone), and that other people are there for us to compete with and to try and beat. But that is not the spiritual life – that is not the Jesus life, for the Jesus life is about love.

And so we return to John 15 and Jesus’ words there…

- “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now *remain* in my love.

- You remain in my love by keeping my commands

- And m*y command is this*: Love one another as I have loved you!

- There is no greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

- And y*ou are my friends* if you do what I command.

- You did not choose me, but I chose you *and appointed* you so that you might go out onto the journey of faith and bear fruit…

- And ***this is my command***, this is the fruit I am looking for: Love one another.

Love one another!

The journey of faith is a journey of loving other people.

Some of those people we will enjoy spending time with, others not so much, but we still love them – with the ultimate act of love being a willingness to lay down our lives for them; seeing others as friends to help on the journey of life rather than seeing them as people to compete with.

We saw this in the christening vows today,

- Nathan and Alison vowed to raise Anna in connection with the Church;

- the kids promised to try and be friends to Anna when they see her and to include her in their games;

- and we the grownups committed ourselves to offer love and support to this family as they seek to be the best parents they can be to Anna, and as they seek to honour their vows.

This is all done to remind us that the spiritual life is a team sport, and to remind us of Jesus’ invitation to be friends with God.

So, it is timely to conclude a baptism sermon by raising the question, are we friends with God? Are we remaining in his love by obeying his commandment to love one another? Are we bearing the fruit of love on the journey of faith? Are we willing to lay down our life for our neighbours, or are we trying to compete with them?