November 22, 2026
Paul Purdue preaching

Today, at Early service Evi and Dave Brewster vowed to uphold the church with their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Today, we get to experience two beautiful spiritual moments in worship, baptism and confirmation. Before our sermon we baptized two children, Evers and Olive and after the sermon we will confirm Megan, Miles, Benjamin, Emme, Brynn, Matthias, Gabriel, Glynn, Neils (kneels), Caroline, and Elliott.

We Methodist do things differently than many of our Protestant cousins. We baptize infants and recognize all Christian baptisms from folks who think that they need to go out and crack the frozen lake and baptize somebody the moment they decide to follow Jesus to the most ornate high church celebration of a baptism.. can we do this because we believe that baptism is about God's gift all this is God's gift offered to us without price. We believe that God is at work And there's a second thing I love about our baptism tradition and that is we separate following Christ from the questions about joining the church from the questions about following Christ because we believe following Christ is the most important thing. It is what defines us not our denomination..

We baptize little children because Jesus told us even the youngest children belong inside God's love. Jesus took the little children into his arms and blessed them declaring that "*the kingdom of God belongs to children"* From our first breath, God is rooting for us. "*God is love, the steadfast love of God endures forever, God's mercies never come to an end, God's love never fails, nothing can separate us from the love of God, nothing endures but faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love. (Lamentations 3, 1 John 4, Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 13)*

Our liturgy declares that baptism *"is God's gift, offered to us without price."* We belong to the steadfast love of the Lord before we form our first word or one day formally say "*yes"* to God in confirmation.

Our two sons, Lewis and Caleb, did not need to make a confession of faith to belong to our family. From the first breath we choose them. We baptized them and raised them in church. We prayed over meals and talked about faith. Connie made up little songs for them and sang them awake most mornings. We read to them every night and tucked them in reminding them, "We will always love you" and "I love you to the moon and back". We made them go to school. We took them camping. We taught how to build campfires and roast a perfect marshmallow. We taught them to make drippy sandcastles, snow forts and built an igloo that we slept in. These are some of the things we did to pass along our Purdue/Starnes family values. We Baptise babies promising to model for them what it means to be a Christ Follower until they can decide for themselves who they are!

One day Lewis and Caleb had to make up their minds about who they were as Purdue's. Will they want to be with us sometimes? Will they enjoy being home? If they did not it would break our hearts, but we would still love for them. Here is the thing: I can not imagine God loves us less than Connie and I love our children. I can not imagine God ever walking away from us. *"Love never fails"* Like the parents in Jesus' parable of the lost child, God leans on the gate, looking outward, longing for us to come home, always ready to run out to greet us, when we decide to come home. (Luke 15)

There are some beautiful understandings in our passage today

1. Paul writes a personal letter. Imagine that, a personal letter is part of the Bible. Paul speaks of Timothy's tears and their longing to see one another. Paul speaks of remembering Timothy in his prayers. The Bible is a deeply personal book- with names of cities and people. Moses, Ester, Ruth, Math Mark Luke John…. And churches in Rome, Philippi and Thessalonica. The Bible is a very personal book because God cares about people, God cares about your tears and joys and God speaks to us through our experiences

2. Paul writes to a community and speaks of his spiritual anceastor… as that tells us something about our faith, it is wider than some believe, because you see Paul is the first one in his family to become a Christian, but he believes God was working faithfully with his ancestors who were Jewish and they were being faithful. Paul speaks of how Timothy's faith first lived in his grandmother, his mother and now within him. "This faith is at work in you"

3. The spirit of God is with you, within. Paul tells the readers to rekindle the gift of God Paul writes *For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.* You may not always feel loved, powerful or self disciplined,,, Paul tells us to rekindle the gift of God. Rekindle means to tend to the campfire, to add things it needs and maybe blow on the ashes until the flames stir again. We need community, we need prayer, we need a safe place to ask questions and people to help us. We need others to inspire us and help us do faith in 2027 and beyond

So just know this, you were baptized into God's love, that will never lose or forsake us… God's love is empowering you… and love it the most powerful thing in the world and as you take these vows… God is rooting for you and so are we. amen