

When little Ryan Pacholek-Mayer is baptized today, listen for the echoes.

Remember the Voice that spoke when Jesus was baptized, saying *You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.*

Remember the Voice that kept calling the boy Samuel's name in the temple.

Remember the Voice that told Jeremiah,
*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you...*

*Do not say, "I am only a boy,;
for you shall go to all to whom I send you....
I am with you to deliver you.*

It is the same Voice speaking today, naming and claiming Ryan as once it did with so many of us, and we will enthusiastically welcome Ryan into the community and mission we share. We'd better, because he'll need the help.

The Voice told little Samuel to speak a hard word of truth to the powerful priest Eli.

The Voice told Jeremiah to speak a hard word or truth to the people of Israel, a word that would pluck, pull, destroy, and overthrow, a word that would blow up Jeremiah's cell phone with death threats.

The Voice summoned Jesus to speak a hard word to his home congregation about the infuriating ways of God, whose favor and blessing was not just targeted at other people instead of them, but people they had reason to loathe: foreign people, like the dirt poor widow and the filthy rich enemy commander.

What kind of Messiah stands up to give a State of the Union Address and tells the middle class, *Sorry, but my administration is going to focus on supporting well-funded terrorists and the extreme poor in other countries who make less than a hundred dollars a year?*

This is the great fulfillment of Scripture, in your hearing, but not in your life.

The people of Nazareth respond by skipping the hymn of the day and trying to murder the preacher.

*You shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you,* says the Voice, who then adds quickly,
*Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you.*

It is small comfort when the little boy walks up to the powerful old man to tell him that the Voice says his irresponsible reign is over.

It's small comfort when the young prophet consigned by the Voice to a life of celibacy and truth-telling hears only mockery and condemnation and rumors of assassination plots on the lips of his contemporaries.

It is small comfort when the young preacher walks up the hill to the edge of the cliff, or later when he walks uphill again shouldering his cross, because he listened to the Voice.

The Voice will tell you, young Ryan, that you are beloved, and that love is both your strength and your vocation, your calling and your confidence.

Saint Paul will tell you, as he did to a Corinthian congregation that desperately needed to hear it, that love is patient, kind, strong, triumphant, and that it rejoices in the truth.

What they don't tell you is the truth spoken by the prophet Roy Orbison: *Love hurts. Love scars, love wounds and mars, any heart, not tough, or strong enough to take a lot of pain.*

How could it not be painful?

The world exploits patience and kindness and rewards the boastful and arrogant.

The world runs to interview the irritable and relentlessly trains us to insist on our own way.

The world rejoices in wrongdoing but has no palate or patience for the truth.

The world values flashy powers and big stories; it is much more interested in moving mountains than just holding a heart that is still heavier, bearing and enduring and hoping.

And the church, we who are the community called to embody and carry this odd calling of love among ourselves and in the world, have only too much of the loveless world in us.

Love is hard work, and when it is deep enough to speak the truth, it is dangerous, too.

The Voice that loves you, Ryan, really does love you, calls you also to love.

Baptized beware: love hurts.

That is why, when you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and watermarked with Love, we will trace the sign of the cross.

Glistening on your forehead will be the same painful scar foreshadowed in today's gospel story.

You are baptized into the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, death first.

You are drenched and drowned in the longsuffering, excruciating way of love, the way of rare courage that dares to serve and to speak the truth, that dares to believe and endure and hope, that dares to listen to and follow the Voice who is love.

The way is long and uphill, the road is treacherous, and there will be plenty of occasion for pain and doubt and maybe even despair.

Stick with it, kid.

Like prophecies and tongues, knowledge and critics, childhood and adulthood, the pain and the struggle will come to an end.

The partial will come to an end.

The plucking up and pulling down will last only a season, and the cross that towers over Friday afternoon will not last the weekend.

Death gives way to resurrection and life.

Plucking up gives way to planting, destruction to construction, pulling down to building up.

Hatred and easy apathy give way to love, and love abides.

Indeed, as the Voice said, it not only abides, it abides with you.

Do not be afraid of them,

for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.

Yes, as we learned from Nazareth, love hurts.

Love scars and scares and wounds and worries and drives one to the very face of the death, the razor's edge of despair.

And then love keeps going, passing on its way through the midst of them, believing and enduring and hoping all things, because even when you kill it, love never ends.

Rejoice in this crazy truth.

Trust the Voice.