

Sermon: “Dear Zoe” on the Occasion of her Baptism
Easter 4 B
Text: John10:11–18

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Hollywood Lutheran Church



Dear Zoe,

I know you are a little too young to listen to me this morning, but I am hoping that all who hear me will one day be able to tell you what a great day this is. This is your *birthday*, Zoe. So today is your first birthday party. And what a way to throw a party, isn't it? And everybody is together to celebrate your *other* birthday, too: your birthday into the family of God. For that is what we do in the celebration of Holy Baptism, is to receive you, by God's grace, into a much, much bigger family.

Yes, we *all* know you are too young to understand this. You're still too young to understand what it means to have *parents*, and grandparents, and an extended family of sisters and brothers of all kinds; or to have sponsors at this party. One day you will understand, but today it is enough just to feel their love. And that is also how it is with Baptism. You're still too young to know much about God, your Father in heaven. One day you will know all this, but today, it is enough just to feel God's love by being held. For, in this room, are the arms of God. And you will feel kisses today. Those are kind of like the kisses of God. So today you will feel what it is like to have God's love.

One of the readings for today, which is printed out for you— when you're old enough to read!— is the 23rd Psalm. It's very famous. And one day I hope you will learn it by heart, just as many of us have done. In this Psalm, it tells us that “the Lord is my shepherd.” But you're not a sheep, Zoe. We're not sheep either! This is picture language from long, long ago. And maybe it's silly— but maybe not—to keep using that picture language.

But when you look at your first story books, you may see pictures of little lambs and other animals. Maybe you will have a stuffed animal, like a warm and fuzzy lamb, that you will carry around with you, and hold. And that's the way it is with God's love, too, because **God hold us**, and even *carries* us when we are too weak or too tired to hold ourselves up. And when we are lost, God will find us, and carry us back again.

So *it's okay* to be one of God's little lambs, because it means God will take care of you, Zoe, and will watch over you, and lead you to a place of safety, and plenty, and of goodness and mercy.

Today is the Sunday of the year that we call Good Shepherd Sunday. You don't even know who the Good Shepherd *is* yet, do you, Zoe? But the good news is that *he knows* who *you* are. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and he knows *your* name: Zoe Dezmay. And that is very good news indeed. Because, already, he loves you. And already he has promised to watch over you and to care for you. When you are old enough to hear his story, you will learn how he took a great risk to care for you, and for all of us, and so the Good Shepherd has brought us all home to our Father in heaven, and has made a place for us in our Father's house.

And in the Gospel I just read, Jesus tells us that there are *other sheep* that do not belong to this fold. I talked about family, Zoe, and maybe that's a better word for all of us than “fold.” A sheep fold is a where a flock, a family of sheep, is safe. And this church is a family of people who are protected and loved by the Good Shepherd. But Jesus tells us that we are *not* the *only ones* he cares about. “I have *other sheep*,” he said. “I must bring them *also*, and they will listen to my voice.”

I bet you don't know *who* those *other sheep are*, do you Zoe? Your world is very small right now: with your loving parents, and your big sister. Well, *today* your family gets a little bigger,

because your Godparents are here, too, your sponsors in Baptism. They are all part of this family. And as you grow up you will know that *all of us* are part of this family, too.

But there are still “other sheep,” in a world out there just too big to imagine. Who are all those other sheep, Zoe? They are *all the creatures*, large and small, in this country and far, far away, whom Jesus loves. As your world gets bigger, you will meet more and more of these wonderful creatures: people and animals of all kinds and sizes and colors and languages. Just remember that God loves them *all*, Zoe, just as God loves you. Jesus knows them all by name, and searches for them all, to bring them home, safely, into this one great big family.

At first, you may be *confused* by all those different creatures, and *different* people. Many will be *very*, very different than you are. There are not only baby girls and boys. The “other sheep” that belong to the family of Jesus, are also young and old, wise and simple, weak and strong, calm and restless; those who speak your language, and those whose language you do not understand. They include ones who stray *easily*, and those who come home *obediently*. But Jesus even includes the free-spirited, the outcast, the lonely or depressed, the lost and the homeless. Jesus loves the good and the bad, because he understands that *all of us* are a little good *and* a little bad—well, okay, maybe sometimes *too much* bad. But it really doesn’t matter, because God forgives what is *bad*, and asks us to do everything we can to bring good into God’s world.

So, little Zoe, that is what Baptism is about. With water, and the Spirit of God, and the promises of God, for Jesus’ sake, *all the bad* is taken away. Everything that can hurt us, or keep us apart from each other, from our family, and from the Good Shepherd, is *taken away* by God’s love. We call that stuff “sin” but we know God takes it away, and we call that “grace.”

And I know that, today, you won’t remember all these things. But your family, your parents, your grandparents, your Godparents, and the whole big family in this room, all have one thing in mind for you: that you never forget God loves you. No matter how big you grow, no matter how big your world becomes, no matter if you wander, or even get lost in life, never forget that God loves you, no matter what. And that the Good Shepherd will find you and bring you home safely.

Amen.

