



Sermon by Pastor Jeremy Walloch – “Bath” (November 7, 2010)

Once there was a little girl who cherished the baths her grandmother gave her.<sup>1</sup> You see, the baths her grandmother gave were quite different than those from her parents. Her grandmother lit a candle. She ran the water higher and warmer than expected. She poured a whole bottle of Avon bubble bath into the tub (though if running it for herself, a few drops would suffice). She gently picked her little girl up and guided her into the water, and then she gently washed her, the water even running slowly, importantly as it meandered down her hair, forehead, and body. Grandmother talked to her little girl for as long as they needed, and then she removed her purest, most unused display towel, which still had the new-towel fresh-from-the-dryer fluff. After drying her, she retrieved a bottle of massage oil she had received as a Christmas gift many years ago, and rubbed down that little girl until she shown and smelled like the first sunny day in Spring. Finally, she wrapped her up snugly in the white towel so you could just see two eyes peeking out, then she smiled at her, and sang. This little girl was her grandmother’s princess, and nothing in the world could ever change that. Sometimes they told each other “I love you,” but most of the time the words proved unnecessary.

This love was evident at bath time, and at many other later times—perhaps most noticed by others when the granddaughter was singing or dancing at church or school and her grandmother would push her way to the front.

As a woman, the former-little girl soon discovered the world handled her quite differently. A candle only lit for her birthday, showers a better use of time and water than baths, soaps and oils poured prudently, conversations on-the-go while mostly-distracted—few told her they loved her, none sang.

And so, whenever the world disheveled her, whenever times grew too cold, people too callous, situations too rough, life too filthy, you know where she’d go? You *know* where she’d go. She’d slowly walk to her bathroom releasing a drawn-out sigh, and close the door with relief,

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<sup>1</sup> A reflection in Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, pp. 18f provided the initial spark.

and pick up a matchbook, and pull out her own bottle of Avon. Whenever she ended up sitting alone in her tub, she became acutely aware of the distance she'd gone from her grandmother's bath, and all she could do about it was sob.

As we gather in this candlelit room this morning, we gather around a bath. A small one, granted, just big enough for the top of a head. And this weekend, in the candlelight, around the bath, I baptize my daughter.

It'll be a small family gathered with none of our grandparents—four died years ago, three can't come, and one died last night. Yet here today we unveil Caroline's true identity and destiny: she is not merely the daughter of a country parson and homemaker, but the royal daughter of the king of the universe; she is not just another resident of Lee County, but a necessary citizen of God's kingdom; she is not simply destined to fit it and go along with the flow, but to shine with an unworldly glow. She is cleansed and anointed and pampered by the Lord once and for all so she may claim God's promises and truth and love wherever in the world He leads her.

The rest of her life she won't always be so pampered. She'll be hurt. She'll be disappointed. She'll be afraid. She'll experience loss. She'll get covered in the grime of the street, the dust of the passing trains, the tears and tears of bruised bodies and scraped emotions.

But she will always have one day in Giddings, Texas, when candles were lit, a bath run, oil poured, family prepared, godparents vowed, an assembly sang, God's Word read, His promises claimed, and on that day the room seemed more full than it should have been, because in every available space in the pews, in every vacant inch, were the angels and saints eager to witness her coronating bath, with her great-grandparents pushing their way to the front.

May you who have been washed clean in the holy bath of baptism and who were given your identity as royal, beloved children of God's kingdom, preserve the blessed faith of all the saints unto that day when Christ presents us cleansed and clothed in white before his glorious throne. Amen.