

## God invites us – the meaning of Baptism & Confirmation Confirmation & Baptism Service on 25 July at Peace Church

Dear Akua, dear Esther, dear Priscilla, this is your day! Today is a celebration of your young and beautiful lives. Today God invites you to live with him a life of love and grace. When you were born, God invited you into his kingdom. When you were baptized, you became a member of God's world-wide family. God invites you to a life in his awesome creation every day. Every day over the last fourteen years of your young lives... every day in all our lives, is an invitation to a life with God in this world...

Baptism is such an invitation. Confirmation too.

Baptism is a solemn and important event, which invites us to be followers of Jesus Christ. You all three, Akua, Esther and Priscilla who have their confirmation today were baptized as children. As very young kids – by me.

Maybe you don't remember it because you were so little. But I do, your family does, your Godparents do, and the congregation does.

In some way it may seem strange to baptize very young children. They cannot understand what is going on in the ceremony and they cannot make promises for themselves. So why do we baptize children?

Why do we baptize Norah today?

The most important truth which baptism points to is that God's love comes first. We become capable of love because God first loved us. Nobody earns God's love – it is pure grace. It is there for us before we are born, before we are baptized, before we can speak, or know right from wrong, before we can understand.

Everyone is loved by God. Baptism is God's invitation to that love. And confirmation is a chance for those baptized as a child to express their response to God's daily offer of love and grace.

Baptism and confirmation are not private rituals that are just about a child and his or her family.

Baptism and confirmation are happening within a community because God does not want us to live alone. God's love for the world and its people can only be experienced when people are there for us in our lives with their love and care.

So, both – Baptism and Confirmation – are times in our lives, when God confirms how special we are, how much loved we are, and how God wants us to live our lives: in happiness and fulness.

God invites us to a life with him – in the footsteps of his son Jesus.

We are invited to come and meet each other and God.

Psalm 23 speaks about God preparing a table before us. The whole psalm is a confession of faith by a person who dedicates her life to God. You prepare a table before me... Our life takes place at God's table!

God invites us to live with him – not only on Sundays, and never alone!

God invites us to live with him as the whole worldwide family of his children.

Our life takes place in God's presence - every moment of our life - with all we live and do.

And it is there in God's presence, that we meet each other.

Meeting is a "godly event."

When we meet God and each other, when we meet God in each other, there is love and grace, and peace and justice – all things which we are invited to accept for ourselves and to share with others.

Come, and live a happy life, Esther, God seems to say.

Come and have enough and even more than enough of all you need, Priscilla.

Come, sit down, feel at home, be safe, Akua.

Come and stay, Norah.

Come and rest, all of you.

Come and celebrate – here and now – and over and over again.

Our life takes place within God's abundant and unfathomable love.

Here is all we need for life.

Here our dreams and visions are nourished.

Here ideas are shared & plans made.

Here friendships begin.

Here help is offered.

Here we are supported and strengthened.

Here we can find the courage for new beginnings and exciting life journeys.

Here we meet and speak with each other.

Here we work for peace & justice & human rights.

God's agenda with which we live, contains issues of freedom and happiness for all people, equality between men and women, equal chances of education for boys and girls, fair forms of economy, and an end to any exploitation.

God's agenda for you three confirmands and for everyone in this church today, does not only allow but requires overthrowing rules and traditions when they harm people more than they serve them.

This is something very important which over and over again is mentioned in the Manna & Mercy book which Akua, Esther and Priscilla worked through in their homes in all those months in which we could not meet in person.

God is inviting us to live a life of fullness, of justice and of peace, in what the author of the book calls a "Manna & Mercy society". There everyone has enough. People are God's partners and help constantly to shape and recreate the earth according to God's ideas and plans for his creation. God passionately loves us and offers us his friendship.

Here at this point let me quote from "Manna & Mercy":

God wants all of us to know that: (Manna&Mercy p 76f)

...we are not alone. God is there for us. Always.

...the Holy Spirit continues to act in our lives to heal, mend, enlighten and unite.

...God continues to act. God has not abandoned the planet earth but lives and acts with our help for the liberation of all humanity and all creation. The story of God goes on because we live.

...everything and everyone has dignity. All are created good – with gifts to share for the beautiful unity of the whole.

...hope is certain. God declares in the life of Jesus: there will be peace.

...grace abounds. God's love comes as extravagant, undeserved, unconditional gift.

...all are needed. God calls us, all of us, to serve as partners – to work, play, dream, suffer, and even die for the sake of the new creation.

...all are invited.

Everyone, poor and rich, outsiders and insiders, women and men, young and old, those who are healthy and whole and those who are sick, lost empty, guilty, rejected, lonely, hopeless, depressed, oppressed – ALL are invited to live in partnership with God and sing the hymn of a new creation, mended and made whole by God's love and passion.

Amen.

Let us sing of this new creation by singing "Beauty for Brokenness", TS 37