

Sarah Kretzmann  
January 13, 2012

If you've ever seen "Fiddler on the Roof," You will remember Rip  
Tevye's heart-wrenching song, "Sunrise, Sunset." Tevye is the father of five  
daughters. The wedding day of his eldest daughter Tzeitel approaches.

Tevye and his wife Golde begin the sing, and finally the entire community  
joins in the singing of "Sunrise, Sunset." The first lines in this beautiful yet  
haunting song go like this:

*Is this the little girl I carried?*

*Is this the little boy at play?*

*I don't remember growing older, when did they?*

*When did she get to be a beauty?*

*When did he grow to be so tall?*

*Wasn't it yesterday when they were small?*

Although I have not yet witnessed the weddings of my sons, I have a sneaking suspicion if I blink my eyes, I will find them speaking to me about finally meeting The One, the love of their life, and I brace myself for that day...because we are still in the simple childhood days of scrambled or fried eggs, of peanut butter with or without jelly, of who gets to sleep on the top bunk, of negotiations with mom for just five more minutes before bedtime.

These are childhood days, but already it seems like yesterday when these were baby days, when diapers and bottles and naps consumed the days, when first steps were being taken and first teeth were being cut....and already, those wobbly steps have quickened to a dead sprint and scraped knees and bruised elbows...and already, those first baby teeth are falling out and are carefully tucked under the pillow for the Tooth Fairy to find. The days bridging baby days to boyhood days seem like the blink of an

eye....will the days bridging boyhood days to adulthood days go as fast? I suspect so.

This summer is already packed with weddings of ones who were little when I first came here, and I find myself thinking of the song “Sunrise, Sunset” a lot...I look at the man and woman standing in front of me and I still see them in braces, I still remember their excitement at getting their learner’s permits, I remember the self-conscious look in their adolescent eyes. And now, they stand in front of me and ask me to please marry them, and they are all grown up, with jobs and cars and homes and plans and straight teeth and confidence, and I wonder, “When did this happen? When did she get to be a beauty? When did he grow to be so tall?”

Today is a “Sunrise, Sunset” moment for us when we catch a glimpse of Jesus in this morning’s Gospel from Luke. Just yesterday he was a baby in a manger, surrounded by kings and shepherds and angels, all craning their

necks to get a look at the face of God's Word made flesh...just yesterday we were singing "Silent Night" in a church flickering with candlelight, just yesterday the earth received her infant king.

But today, suddenly, without warning, he is all grown up. Jesus is no longer a baby. He is a thirty-year old man. And he is leaving home, because he has work to do. I can almost picture his mother Mary watching him go, peering out from her doorway as he walks down the road. She sees images of Jesus as a child, running and jumping and playing in this same dusty road, and now he is leaving as a man, all grown up... "When did this happen?" she must have thought, "When did he grow to be so tall? Wasn't it yesterday when he was small?" And I am certain she cries when he leaves, because she remembers the angel Gabriel's words, that this Jesus would one day die to save the world from death, and suddenly, with the blink of an eye, he's all grown up and it's time for him to go, to begin this work of saving the world,

and he leaves, and Mary watches him go and surely she knows the next time she sees him will be as she stands at the foot of the cross, as she looks up at her bleeding and dying baby turned man.

But before Jesus leaves town, he is baptized. The heavens open, and a voice thunders from the clouds, “You are my Son, my Beloved.” And Jesus needs to hear those words, because he knows the path that lies ahead of him, as he leaves his cradle behind and journeys towards the cross. He knows what lies in store for himself, that he will be arrested and beaten and tortured and crucified...the days of angelic lullabies are over, the safety of nestling at his mother’s breast are gone. A whip awaits him, and a crown of thorns.

And while we know Jesus is God, we also know that Jesus is a man, and if he is a man, surely he must be afraid of what his future holds for him...hence the voice of his Father, coming down from heaven, reminding

his Son who he is, and that he is loved, giving him the strength he needs to meet what lies ahead.

And isn't it the same for us, really? Doesn't our baptism give us the strength we need to meet the days ahead? Because our baptism is that moment when God joins himself to us forever, promising never to leave us, to promising to love us no matter what. Sounds kinda like marriage vows, doesn't it? Well, a baptism is a marriage between God and us, but it's a perfect marriage, not like earthly marriages, where vows are broken all the time. God's baptismal vows to us are never broken.

When a person is baptized, God says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, your Savior.

You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you.”

We, on the other hand, are not such great spouses. Our vows to God sound something like vows that were on the show Reno 911, “I promise to live with you in a semi-monogamous relationship until something better comes along.” God’s vows to us sound like this, “I promise to share your life with you, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, and I promise to be faithful to you forever.” We are not faithful; God is faithful. Our word fails; God’s word holds true.

As Jesus grows from boy to man and journeys from cradle to cross, he carries his Father’s baptismal vows with him, to give him strength to endure the very, very dark days that are just over the horizon. As we move from baby to child to adult, as we move from crib to grave, as we move from

teething to toothless, from smooth skin to wrinkled, from black hair to gray,  
from sharp eyes to dim—all in the blink of an eye—we remember the vows  
that God makes at baptism, to love us no matter what, even as he shakes his  
head in wonder and asks himself, “When did she get to be such a beauty?  
And when did he grow to be so tall?” And he gives his Son, now a man, to  
die for all.