

What do we hold? The baby
The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker
January 12, 2020

Blessed be God who animates our lives and calls us to show up, our fullest selves, that we might be blessed and bless those we touch. AMEN

I remember liturgical practicum in seminary which as it sounds, is a time to Practice the various liturgical offices. when it came to baptism,
My dear friend Kevin panicked and froze. he simply could not hold the rubber toy doll!
I remember at first thinking it was funny until I realized his anxiety was real and deep.
He never "held the baby" even though we kept urging him to do so.
Kevin was someone who had an amazing handle on the prayer book and able to navigate and locate just the right prayers but when called to hold the baby he simply could not do so.

Most of us have obstacles, physical or psychological, which hinder us from being our fullest selves and engaging in God's creation. Plans and excuses, rationalizations and scars, can cause us to delay, postpone, balk at the simplest of tasks. And the simplest of tasks mask a complexity of emotions.

During this time of Epiphany a special light shines on those important moments and might give us the strength to step outside our defenses and simply show up as witnesses to the birth of Christ in our lives. To simply hold the baby.

Hold the baby has become my mantra for 2020 especially as I recall this seminary experience and make meaning of it and especially having come upon a sermon preached at Christmas which changed me life!

I don't remember being more struck by anything before. I came across it in a random Facebook feed from EFM. It was attached to an image of mother and child and I almost didn't open it thinking it another sweet story about mothers and babies, not that those aren't wonderful enough but I just wasn't in the mood. I was feeling anxious about the world, my impending trip to the holy land, my sermon?! my sick grandchild, oh did I say the world?

I am not sure what I was looking for really: information, an answer, a solution, a pill?

But EFM is a good site with theological insight so I clicked on it!

I read it, and wept, and read it again, and printed out and read it again, and sent it to David across the room, my parents, my siblings, my children, my friends...

Why?

at that moment and perhaps at this one, it said all I wanted to say and hear.

how do we know love? by words? often by touch

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how do we know comfort? by words? often by touch
how do we know the christ child? by words? or by touch?

we are held that we might hold
we are blessed that we might in turn bless

this sermon became a song I would like to sing to you today and so I offer it as I would those lyrics:

What we Hold by Lonnie Lacy
Preached at St. Anne's Episcopal Church – Tifton, Georgia
[Isaiah 9:2-7](#) [Luke 2:1-14](#)

This may sound odd,
but one of the most important things
anyone ever said to me
when I was still training
to be a pastor was this:
“Honey, whatever that is you’re doin’,
you gotta put it down
and come hold this baby.”

“What?”

“Put it down,
and come hold this baby.”

I was a brand new chaplain-intern
at Children’s National Medical Center
in Washington, D.C.

I was all of 24 years old,
just two years out of college.

I had just arrived and been told
that the floor I would be covering
was the neonatal intensive care unit.

I knew nothing.

So there I was on my first day.

My starchy white shirt.

My coat and tie.

My shiny new plastic badge.

A clipboard in my hands
and a clueless expression on my face.

I had no idea what I was doing
as I stood watching those nurses
tending those babies

who were fighting for their very lives.

So, I did what any of us would do:

I tried my best
to look very busy
and very important.

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By the way,

if you ever want to look

very busy and very important

just carry a clipboard

and flip the pages up and down

while you glance up and side to side.

As a wise man once said,

“60% of the time it works every time.”

But not on this nurse.

“Honey,” she said,

“whatever that is you’re doin’,

you gotta put it down

and come hold this baby.”

“What?”

“Put it down,

and come

hold

this

baby.”

Let the record show,

this nurse was no

Virgin Mary meek and mild.

Before I knew it,

she had physically

yanked the clipboard

from my hands,

spun me around by my shoulders,

popped me down into a rocking chair,

and placed somebody else’s baby

right into my arms.

“There,” she said.

“If you’re gonna be

that baby’s chaplain,

that’s what he needs you to do.”

“Uh okay,” I said,

“But what else am I supposed to do?”

“Nothing!” she said.

“There’s nothing else you can do.

You just hold him.

And love him,

And pray.”

Turns out,

she was right.

A huge part of how

I learned to be a pastor

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was by holding babies
in a hospital wing
for an entire summer.

The thing is,
when you're holding a baby,
there really isn't much else
you can do.

Aw sure,
we've come up with
all kinds of ingenious ways
to try to get around that:

baby wraps,
baby slings,
Baby Björns.

In fact, when I later became a dad
I considered myself
the reigning champion
of holding the baby
while also unloading the dishwasher.

(But just because you can
doesn't mean you should.)

It's just true.

When you're holding a baby,
there's not much else you can do . . .
except just
hold it,
and love it,
and pray.

And honestly,
the baby can't do
all that much
either.

The two of you
just sort of . . .
melt into one another.
You just sort of . . . exist . . . together.

So, maybe—just maybe—
that's why you're here tonight.
I don't know your business.
I don't know why
you think you're here.
I don't know what you think
drew you out,
got you dressed,
brought you to this place

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under the cover of darkness

in the muggy midnight air

while all the “normal” people

are already home

fast asleep.

I don't know

what you think it was,

but here's what I can tell you:

I don't think it was a Facebook ad;

I don't think it was a personal invitation;

I don't think it was tradition.

Whether you know it or not,

you have come here tonight

for one thing,

and one thing only.

You have come here

to hold the Baby.

Whether you know it or not,

he is the One

who has brought you here tonight,

and really,

there is nothing else

you can do.

You just hold him.

And love him,

And pray.

But be forewarned, my friends,

for a night like this

comes at great cost.

To hold this Baby—

this Jesus whom we proclaim tonight—

means you are going

to have to put

some things

down.

When you hold this Baby,

nothing else matters.

Everything else

falls away.

When you hold this Baby,

the warriors

must put down

their tramping boots

and all their garments

rolled in blood.

The oppressors

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must put down
their rods.

The emperors
must put down
their censuses.

The shepherds
must put down
their staffs.

The judges
must put down
their gavels.

The bankers
their pencils.

The farmers
their plows.

The surgeons
their scalpels.

The journalists
their pens.

The scholars
their books.

The janitors
their brooms.

The interns
their clipboards.

The internet trolls
their keyboards.

The leaders
their egos.

When you and I hold this Baby—
when we hold this Jesus—
everything else must fall away:

our cell phones,

our distractions,

our ambitions,

our rights,

our wrongs,

our hurts,

our grievances . . .

our power.

“Whatever that is you’re doin’,

you gotta put it down

and come hold this baby.”

But here’s the final twist.

Here’s the insane grace of it all.

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For all that you and I have to lay aside—

for all the power we have to let go

in order to hold this Baby—

the thing is (don't you know?),

he has already gone first.

Yeah, you have to give up a lot

in order to hold a baby,

but think of how much more

you have to give up

in order to BE a baby.

He could have come

any way he wanted.

As a mighty warrior.

As a fearsome beast.

As a petty king

with swagger,

and prestige,

and power.

But instead,

this Baby—

this Jesus—

came like this.

Whatever it was he was doing,

he put it down

all those years ago

so he could come and rest

right there

next to your beating heart.

So, my friends,

what is it?

What is it

that you get to lay aside,

even if just for this one night?

The Creator of your soul

has put down everything he had,

because all he ever really wanted . . .

was just to be with you.

So whatever that is you're doing,

put it down.

Come on.

Hold the Baby.

There's nothing else

you can do.

You just hold him.

And love him.

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And pray.
Amen.

we come together not just at Christmas to hold christ. we come together to also hold each other, the bearers of christ.

Today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, what is for me one of the most important days in our liturgical calendar and what is a very important reminder of our belonging believing and believing. Our baptismal covenant is a living promise we make with God. It is of course about doing certain acts like studying scripture and working for justice, and it is also about who we are, who we are meant to be as the Body of Christ.

we are meant to hold the baby
the christ child has been born...in us and we hold Him.
we are meant to care for him

and more often than we realize that involves rocking him and embracing him instead of thinking about doing so or making lists about doing so
in a few moments we will bless the water and renew our baptismal commitments

as we do so I invite you to put everything else down, your to do lists, your shoulds, your blaring thoughts and just be in the presence of the One who came that we should be saved. the one who holds us.

Hold the baby
Baptize the baby Jesus with me
Hold the baby
know he and you are beloved
hold the baby and know that you too are held in the loving arms of God