

October 14: supposedly that's the day I was baptized. It's not like I can tell you any differently; I wasn't exactly aware of what was going on, then, being just a few months old and all. So, instead, I have to take the word from a piece of paper that I received from my Confirmation ceremony, that day when I was supposed to affirm my baptism; again, as if I can be, even somewhat, spiritually aware as a young teenager, but that's beside the point.

And yet, as the years have gone by, and witnessing a few baptisms here and there, presiding in a few more along the way (never to the thunderous extent of heavens opening with Jesus', necessarily, but they still counted, nonetheless); but, in recent years, I have latched onto the *other* people in the room: not the one getting baptized, not the parents, not the godparents, not even the immediate family being forced against their will to sit in the first pew that particular Sunday. Instead, the *other* people, the other still-children of God, fellow sisters and brothers in Christ in all the other pews in the back, just along for the water-baptismal ride that morning. Actually, they thought they could just be by-standers while the pastor took the child into the water ride against their will, to say the least.

Except, now I don't know if the liturgy was all that different thirty-plus years ago, but in recent years, the other people in the room, the fellow sisters

and brothers in Christ are expected to make a promise to the new-born child of God, to the newest member of the body of Christ: a promise to support and pray for their new life in Christ. More often than not, we would prefer just to be by-standers while the child and the family is taken on a ride of a lifetime, to put it mildly. We have our own topsy-turvy journeys to deal with; that's more than enough. Except, God envisions this whole baptism thing to not just be an individual enterprise, but a joint-community effort for the entirety of a lifetime-ride.

Now, I obviously cannot remember the *other* people in the room on October 14 thirty-plus years ago. *I* don't even remember being in the room. But I have a feeling there were a few people in those other sanctuary pews, who ended up making an impact on me that they probably didn't even realize at the time.

Mrs. Craig was one of the Sunday school teachers, but for this particular occasion years later, she was playing the role of one of those good 'ole concerned moms in the church. I was running into the sanctuary for some junior play rehearsal with my hat still on my head, because that was the cool thing to sport, then. And Mrs. Craig, sitting at a distant pew, yelled out my name, stopped me in my tracks, and told me in no uncertain terms to take

that hat off, as if I was entering some kind of special room or something.

How dare she say such things, as if she's entitled to correct my outlook or something!

Now, at the time, Mrs. Craig was probably trying to instill the mindset in a selfish adolescent boy that the sanctuary was the house of God. And we dare not show any disrespect in our behavior or through what we wear, for the sake of the potential heavens opening up. As the years have gone by, I may no longer believe the church building to be the only place where God is in holy operation; but it's still a place with many rooms of countless memories, sacred ones at that: including many baptisms, Confirmations, graduation recognitions, funerals, weddings, and countless more in between. It's not just God we owe respect to, but to the other sisters and brothers in Christ, who shaped not just a congregational entity, but supported and nurtured many rides of lifetimes.

There was also Mr. Watchman, ironically-named enough, who maybe didn't have to watch us so much, as listen to those of us who...didn't take our Confirmation vows all that seriously. Because, during many of the Sundays in our high school years, we would go across the street to the Marathon gas station and bring back Mountain Dew, Skittles, Twix, among

other liabilities from the candy line-up, to the balcony of that sanctuary room. And well...let's just say we weren't overly quiet when we got back.

Mr. Watchman could have turned around plenty of times and scolded us into outright oblivion, as he was doing his job in running the sound board while the worship was being broadcasted over the local radio station. He could have stared us down with the fiercest darting eyes to penetrate our very soul, not to mention immediately inform our parents about our downright embarrassing behavior, afterwards. He never did. He didn't make us feel unwelcomed. He didn't make us feel like we weren't good enough to be in that sacred room. He didn't make us think we were good-for-nothing kids in the eyes of God. How dare he *not* say such things and put us in our place, and, instead, exhibit God's grace beyond our understanding!

Then there was Mrs. Schuster, our junior choir director. I couldn't sing in-tune to save my eternal life, but Mrs. Schuster encouraged me to sing out anyway, as if I didn't have to be perfect to be part of that choir, that congregation, that entire body of Christ; as if my imperfect gifts, put together with imperfect others, could help deliver the Gospel meant for all of us imperfect, but, still, adored children of God. How dare she try to convince us that we all had something to offer!

We prefer just to be bystanders on these baptismal waters ride of life. We prefer the parents, godparents, and other biological family take care of their own. We have enough to deal with ourselves. But, that's not the way God wants the body of Christ to operate. God has us connected far too close already, too dependent on one another's imperfect gifts, to make it through this lifetime ride on our own. At some point or another, we all made a promise to not just care for the ones lucky enough to be born into baptism circumstances, but the "others" too, the others beyond the furthest away pew's edge. The very edge that Jesus went immediately to after *His* baptism. So, we follow Him: no longer bystanders, but thrown into the very same relentless river of life overflowing no longer in sin and death, but in the grace and mercy, whose waves will carry us not only throughout this life, but into eternity. And for that Greatest News of all, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen.