

Baptized in Christ

One of the few complaints I received about a sermon I gave was, surprisingly, a Moment for Children of All Ages. I asked the question, “How many people here have gone to school?” I wanted the kids to see that just about everyone, even the “seniors,” had gone to school. The point I was trying to make was that sometimes, everyone must do what they may or may not like. Well, at the conclusion, one woman came up to me and said, “I did not raise my hand when you asked that question because it was ridiculous. Of course, everyone went to school.” I started to defend myself and then realized I wasn’t sure if she would listen to what I had to say. I did say, “There was a reason why I asked it, but thanks for your feedback.”

I have shared that story because I have another question that sounds almost too easy, but it is not “a given”: How many of us gathered here today have been baptized? Don’t be surprised because not everyone has. How many here were baptized as infants or at a time when you don’t remember? I think we asked before, but does anyone remember their baptism? As a matter of fact, we’re going to have an

adult baptism at First Congregational Church of Westfield in a few short weeks. It is more glorious in that this person has chosen to do so as a young adult.

Let me ask another question, but this time I don't want you to answer aloud. Given what we know, would those who are baptized do it again? Don't answer aloud; this is a thought question for you to think about this week. Would you do it again? I'd like to think that I would! Even with all the horrible things that are happening in our country and in the world, I would be baptized to be a follower of Jesus.

What does it mean to follow Christ? Last week, as we celebrated Epiphany, we read "Arise, shine, for your light has come!" It is that same light that we profess to follow. As followers of Jesus, are we not also lights that can shine in the darkness, and maybe be a beacon for those who are in the dark? Every time we open our doors to feed the hungry, be it with a meal, some food that we may have in the church, or a gift card for a local grocery store, we serve as the Light of Christ as we follow Jesus' command. Every time someone in need comes to the Blessed Buys Thrift Shoppe and needs clothes, shoes, a coat, or even

some household goods to start again—and we give them what they need—we serve as a Light of Christ as we follow Jesus’ command. Every time we visit someone in the hospital, or wherever they convalesce, we serve as the Light of Christ as we follow Jesus’ command.

It is important to be good followers of Christ, but we are also called to be open to what the Holy Spirit may be calling us to do to bring that to fruition. We are also called to express our belief in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, as well as to reject evil in all forms. In our call to worship, we acknowledged that the waters of baptism bring us healing and reconciliation as a symbol of nourishment and cleansing. Do we call upon God to help us to be not only physically healed but spiritually healed? Emotional healing can be difficult as we have to be open to the Holy Spirit. Each week, or as often as we pray it, the Lord’s Prayer says, “forgive us our sins or debts or trespasses, as we forgive those who sin, trespass, or are our debtors. Every time we ask for forgiveness and forgive others, we act as the Light of Christ, as we follow Jesus’ command.

Let me ask you again, given what we know, would you still choose to be baptized? I thought it would be appropriate, as we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, that those who have been baptized could, if they so choose, renew their Baptismal Promises.

So, please stand as you are able or so choose.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

Do you renounce the powers of evil and desire freedom of new life in Christ? If so, please say “I do.”

Do you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? If so, please say “I do.”

Do you believe in God?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

One: Do you embrace grace as God’s gift, to be freely given and freely received?

One: Do you recommit to the covenantal and baptized life, the cost and joy of discipleship, and the community of belonging as a member of the Body of Christ?

Father/Mother, Son, and Holy Spirit, we give thanks for the gathering of your people into a beloved community of belonging. By our baptism, we accept the invitation to public and faithful witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world and to be instruments in that work. May we live the baptized life in the Spirit as caring companions of one another, with accountability, support, and grace. Shelter us in your love, nourish us in your truth, and uphold us in your word. May it be so. Amen