

8/25/2019

“Affirmation of Baptism”

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14; 4:1-6; 1 Peter 3:21-22

Series: Moving with the Holy Spirit

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Today we conclude our series this month on “Moving with the Holy Spirit.” Our focus today will be upon Affirmation of Baptism.

With as nice a day as we had outside in Chesapeake City yesterday, and with all the help with food and vendors to sell their products, it was an extra special blessing for me to be able to get acquainted or see again some folks who came into our sanctuary at Trinity Church. One couple, who had been very active in their church in another state, is getting settled into our area and looking for a new church home. Another gentleman shared his story of being baptized at Trinity as a child. And several others, who had come before I had gotten there, spent some time in the prayer room, and left prayer cards on the board for us to join them in prayer for their needs and concerns. Some just came and commented on the beautiful and welcoming sanctuary. So, I’m also very thankful for the hospitality we extended to others yesterday.

Some of you may know that I came from a mixed faith family; my father being Jewish and my mother being Roman Catholic. I had friends of both faiths, and perhaps even others I wasn’t aware of or don’t remember; and perhaps some agnostics or atheists as well.

I do remember going to church for two or three years, in elementary school, with the family of my best friends who lived across the street. It was non-denominational, but I later came to find out from a member of Norwood United Methodist Church, which I was serving at the time, that the church I attended as a child was a branch off from the one in Norwood, then known as Norwood Methodist Episcopal Church in the early 1900’s. It was in that non-denominational church that I received my first Christian Bible and came to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior at the age of nine.

I know that the Holy Spirit continued to lead and guide me in my spiritual journey for years to follow, as what I call an “intentional disciple” of Jesus.

Yet, it wasn’t until I was 25 years old that I asked to be “formally” or “officially” baptized with water, by a Lutheran pastor in Wyoming. In doing so, I became a professing member of that congregation, and a part of the universal body of Christ.

And it wasn't until I had been in a Presbyterian affiliated seminary for almost a year that I decided to become a United Methodist. Interesting I believe, since my physical birth was in the Methodist Hospital in Philadelphia.

The reason I share some of the many details of my life's journey is I believe and have found that God weaves our life, along with that of others, into a wonderful quilt or tapestry of sorts.

And for some of us who have been so blessed, the most wonderful and meaningful stitch in that fabric of life is our baptism into Jesus Christ.

For United Methodists, Baptism is the sacrament, or sacred act, of initiation into the Body of Christ, the church, which joins new members with Christians everywhere. It is a symbol of new life and a promise of God's saving love . . . and a sign of God's forgiveness of our sins. (*What it means to be United Methodist*; Channing Bete, 20014) It is "an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace." We are led by the Holy Spirit to repent, or "turn" again to God.

It is an "Entrance into the church through God's unmerited grace, open to persons of all ages. In the sacrament of baptism, water is administered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands. In baptism, the church claims God's presence and the seal of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:3) (*Book of Discipline*, 2016, Paragraph 129). (See also Acts 19:1-7)

As the Apostle Paul wrote to the early believers in Ephesus . . .

*"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory."* (Ephesians 1:3-14 NRSV)

*“And,” as Peter wrote, “baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.” (1 Peter 3:21-22 NRSV)*

So, baptism is also the “beginning of a lifelong process of growth in Christ.”

“Baptism:

- Incorporates new members into the church, to promise their spiritual growth
- Identifies the recipient as a baptized Christian
- Signifies death, rebirth and new life
- Assures us that our sins are forgiven”

For United Methodists, baptism is ordained by Jesus Christ, as he instructed his apostles, saying ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** (Matthew 28:19-20)

And so, United Methodists believe that Christian baptism can and need be received only once, but can be reaffirmed.

For those of you who have made a profession of faith in baptism or confirmation, or would like to do so now, let us together affirm our faith as it is found in the Ecumenical Version of The Apostles’ Creed, found in The United Methodist Hymnal #882.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\*\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Let us pray . . .