

Boldly baptizing: welcoming all into community

2 Corinthians 5: 16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

A reminder that as we travel through an exploration of the rituals of our faith, we are currently using the working definition of a ritual being a container. Something we can recognize and hold, in which we can hold things that aren't easily contained; feelings, ambiguities, times when we are between identities or roles. It is also a way to remember that things that are ordinary, that happen all the time, are divine and sacred.

Today I want to speak about baptism. Baptism is one of the rituals that allows us to see something ordinary, water, become through our prayers and Holy Spirit, something extraordinary. We imagine that God's love turns into water and we put that water on the heads of babes, and adults, and seniors. Whoever needs to be reminded they are one in Christ.

While some of us remember our baptisms, others look forward to a baptism and then there are those who do not remember but have seen pictures. Perhaps you are like me and you see yourself in the frilliest dress you ever wore, and hopefully will ever wear, and you are being held by the proudest of grandpas who will not give you to the minister because he loves you so much. The Reverend Burgess convinced my grandfather to finally give me to him so he could put water on my head.

Baptism is a message to our child or our inner child that though the world is big, the world is powerful, though you are (whether you be child or adult) vulnerable and dependent on others, you are also sacred and whole.

It's intimidating to be ourselves in this world. It means that weird balancing act of knowing that we are grown up and smart and still needing to call on our mom, or aunt, or that one elder at church to say, "are you sure I am doing this right?" There is a book out called 'Adulting' and it is awesome. It is written by a young woman and it includes everything from how to boil water (a very important adulting skill) to how to live through those first years on the job where, no matter how good you are, you are the rookie; no matter how good you are, you have to pay your dues.

Adulting is hard work, but it is the work of life. Please know that adulting doesn't mean you have got it all together or you can do it on your own. Oddly, being an adult or a grown up means you know that you must ask for help. You know you often will mess up. Being a grown up means that you are ready for anything, while completely being frightened that anything might just happen.

To be baptized is to claim something that God has already put inside you which is permission to be you. We often think about permission giving as needing someone in power to give us permission to do something. There was an age where we had to ask for permission to get up and go to the bathroom. Luckily that age doesn't last long, but it is there and often we live our lives waiting to get permission to follow our own dream instead of our parents', or to apply for a 'dream job', just for the experience of having applied for the 'dream job'.

It's hard to realize that we are the ones who must give ourselves permission. Not because we are the biggest and the strongest and the most 'adult like', but because we are children of God, made and claimed by God. We need to claim the permission that we can be ourselves, that we can take on challenges, that we can ask for help and that we are forgiven no matter the mess we make.

As I explained to the children, when Data got his new emotion chip, he made a mess of things; he literally melted his cortex. I don't know about you, but I have had days where I thought my cortex was melting. New information or the realization of the consequences of one of my decisions: there are moments where we freeze. This doesn't mean you have failed at being an adult. This means you are being an adult and you will find ways to begin to breath again, and you can ask for help, you can put the blanket over your head even if it is only for those three minutes of the snooze button.

It is hard to learn and to expand and it only starts and gets more and more. My father never finished high school and he is learning every single day. He currently has a PhD. in Grandpa. If you were to ask him what his favorite subject was at school, he would say the classes without words; he wasn't a great reader. So, surprise, surprise when a few years after retirement we all came home, and the house was quiet. Where's Dad? He's not in the garage and he's not outside; well good gravy he was reading a book...a chapter book; no pictures... He has now read more books than...well at least as many books as my mom. It was something he needed to wait to learn. When I think about all the days when he got looked down on by teachers and friends because he couldn't read, or at least he wasn't reading properly. Those days when after work it would have been wonderful for him to sink into a good fiction book and to be taken away from his crazy teenage daughters, but he couldn't. But it came, and he relishes in it.

Permission to be you and to learn how to be your best self is never going to come from this pulpit, from your teachers, your parents. We can say the words, but it was given to you already and it is right inside you. I ask you to keep practicing giving yourself permission to follow the dreams, to claim the forgiveness God offers you each day. To remember your baptism or plan for your baptism because God's grace is already working in you before, during and after the great ritual of baptism. Children of God: may God expand your minds and your hearts so that you know that this is true.

Amen.