

Sermon
Sunday, January 13, 2019
Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22
The Rev. David Martin
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
What Are We Doing Here?

What are we doing here today? There's a lot of people and a lot of action and a lot of extra equipment up here.

What's going on?

What are we doing here today?

We are welcoming 5 new members into the community of Christ. That's what we're doing. We are just about to baptize 5 young people and welcome them into the household of Christ.

It's amazing.

It's a sacrament.

A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Before my ordination, Fr. Christopher told me that the actual ceremony of me being ordained was simply putting an official stamp of approval on something that God had already been at work on in my life – calling me into the ministry of a deacon.

So today, we are going to officially welcome these young people into a family in which they already belong. Baptism is an outward and visible sign (putting water on someone's head) of an inward and spiritual grace (accepting God's incredible love for us demonstrated in Christ's life, love and sacrifice.)

Today is a day of water. Water which sustains life. Water which washes away our sins. Water which Jesus turned to wine, walked on, and shared with the Samaritan women at the well. Water is a symbol that God gives us life.

Today is a day of community. We are all gathered here today to witness this event. We play an important part in the baptism of these young people. We are part of their community and we will promise to help them learn and grow in God. We will be asked if we will accept that role. And when the times comes, I expect each and every one of us to respond at the top of our lungs with a resounding "WE WILL!"

Today is a day of asking for help. The parents and sponsors of these young people will answer questions about raising these children according to God's plans. They answer they

will “with Gods’ help.” All of us will renew our baptismal vows today as well. We will pray that we might be the best people we can possibly be “with God’s help.”

Today is a day of oil. Each young person will be sealed with oil and marked as Christ’s own forever. So, not only are we welcoming them into this community of faithful followers of Christ, we are also telling everyone that they are each part of the body of Christ – forever! You can go astray. You can wander off the path. You can do some really stupid things. But you are going to be a child of God forever.

Today is a day of light. We will light a candle for each of these youth. That is the light of Christ. That light will guide our footsteps for the rest of our lives. We might think that light dims or we may even think it has gone out. But it hasn’t. Just as we are marked as Christ’s own forever, we also have the unfailing light of Christ in our lives.

My dentist is a Christian. I know this because during one visit for a crown, I had a study book with me to read during the waiting periods. The book was for my classes toward ordination. Dr. Gardner asked me about it and we discussed our Christian faith. It’s clear that he is more fundamental or evangelical than me. He’s a great guy and now every time I visit his office, he asks me how my ministry is going.

On one Friday visit, I explained that our church was going to baptize two young children that weekend. I could tell he wasn’t totally on board. He said he had been baptized as an infant in the Roman Catholic Church. But then, when he was old enough to understand the significance of baptism and actually make up his own mind about it, he was baptized again. He then added that his bucket list contained the act of being baptized yet again in the Jordan River, just like Jesus.

My mouth was full of those cotton tubes. If I’d been able to talk, I think I might have said something like “Wow. That’s a lot of baptizing. What makes you think it didn’t take the first time?”

We believe that once one is baptized the act is final and complete. There is no need for a do-over. We gather each week and ask forgiveness of our sins. Even with our own human failings, we do not need to return to the beginning and start all over again. We will always be a member of this beautiful community of Christ. We will always be marked as Christ’s own forever.

That is the beauty of God’s love - of Christ’s sacrifice- of the Holy Spirit’s grace of baptism. They are here. They are always here. They are like a perfect gift card with no limit and no expiration date. They are freely given no matter if we forget them or don’t feel we really want to use them right now.

What are we doing here today? We are here to welcome. We are here for water. We are here for community. We are here for help. We are here for oil. We are here for light.

Today's gospel tells us when Jesus was baptized, he heard a voice claim him to be God's beloved. That moment tells us that Jesus belongs to God. Who Jesus was is hidden in the deep love and mystery of God. Jesus' baptism made it clear that he had a relationship with God.

That's what we're doing here today. In the water of baptism, we are acknowledging these young people belong to God. Through the sprinkling of water and anointing with oil, their identity as Christ's beloved children is celebrated and made clear. They are meant to become God's friends throughout their lives just as each of us are meant to be God's friends.

Baptism reminds us all that we belong to God and that God belongs to us. We are reminded that in the mystery called the church we belong to each other in Christ. What a joyous day for each of us to remember our own baptism and the awesome truth that we belong to God.

We belong to God through welcome, water, community, help, oil, and light.