

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost/Baptism July 21, 2024

“Sacraments and Community”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Episcopal Church, on this Ninth day of Pentecost but also as we welcome into the community of Christ, Ender Ketvirtis. It is with great honor this community accepts this dedication from Ender’s parents to raise him knowing our Lord and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in both his and their lives.

Our readings today expand on the human condition beginning with Genesis when God expresses his desire to make humankind, and then does so, in God’s image. He then expresses that humankind be fruitful and become stewards of the earth.

Our next reading actually describes how we should care for the earth and for each other, through love that is patient and kind, not envious or boastful, not angry or in a way that would stack up wrongs like an in-debt bank account. Love, in all honesty, true love cannot be measured.

Which leads us to the love of God who sent his son Jesus to show us how to live and love in the way that God initially intended. So why at a baptism would we want to read about Jesus as a young boy? Because today, with us we have a baby boy, entering into a community of faith, and hopefully this faith will continue until Ender is also twelve or thirteen when he decides to come back to the church for his confirmation.

What is it with all these celebrations in church, what is it that is so important in these sacraments? The display we have when we baptize, confirm, marry and bury, are all markers of an inside movement of the spirit that has happened or is in the process of happening already.

One does not wake up one morning and say, today we will be baptized? Well, maybe they do. But in most cases, and especially for young parents, baptism is a promise and commitment that they have already begun, by being patient, kind, not envious or boastful. And now is the time to declare that openly to God and a community.

However, a sacrament, as you may have noticed, is never done alone. Even the simple act of prayer alone in the darkest of nights in the privacy of your room includes the Holy Spirit and possibly the loved ones or saints that have gone before - listening and assisting as needed.

So, one is also not alone in baptism which is also a call to the Godparents and the community to continue to strive every day to live up to becoming more like Jesus in actions, words, and deeds.

Now Ender may never run away to stay in a church and sit among professors of the faith when he grows up. But it is our hope that he feels at home and in his "Father's House" when he comes to church. This is the work of the community to make him feel so.

We renew our vows of baptism today as a community to be in line with Ender and his parents as he grows. And although the reading and responses of our vows is repetitive and something many of us have done

many times, it is not without consequence. We are as a community saying that if you need something, please call and we will respond with love. Like Jesus, we are called to respond in love, not judgment, as no one here today could cast a stone. We are all in this messy sinning world together.

We are called to respond to solve issues, not prolong suffering, and we are called to continue to hold each other's faith, even when they are in serious doubt of whether there is a God. The words we will say today hold weight and have meaning.

Does that mean that as a community we will do no wrong? Of course not. Does it mean Ender's parents and godparents will never make a mistake; of course not. Does it mean that Ender will never sin; absolutely not. But what our vows and promises today do mean, is that even through our mistakes, our sins, our times of trial, we know we can turn to the Lord and each other. And we can do so through love.

Love is not a wishy-washy, sentimental feeling but instead, a steadfast desire to care, sometimes even when it hurts. When we go to a funeral, we hear about someone's life: mostly the good, sometimes the bad. But it makes us review our lives and where we are at this point in our journey.

When we go to a wedding, and if we are married, we often remember our own wedding: mostly the good, and sometimes the bad. We review where we are in our relationships and maybe rekindle those feelings that brought us to that sacrament in the first place.

When we renew our baptismal vows, if you were an infant (as Ender is) you may now as an adult understand what your parents and godparents desired for you. If you were baptized as an adult, you are remembering those promises to love one another and reviewing the mostly good and sometimes bad, to see if you can walk a little closer to Jesus this time.

I want to leave you with this phrase that comes from Jesus' mother Mary, but could have easily been bellowed from the sky above, "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." Today, I hope in your hearts, you feel you have been found: by God, by those who love you closely, and by your spiritual community. Amen