

# Sermon: Pentecost 16

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Year C

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 1

Philemon 1-21

Luke 14:25-33

When I was in seminary... we learned about how some people in the medieval church were superstitious... at that time... the service was in Latin... and when the priest spoke the words of institution... *hoc est meum corpus*... (this is my body)... with his back to the people... in a noisy sanctuary... with maybe some farm animals milling around... what people heard was *hocus pocus* ... and Eucharistic magic was born...

And sometimes... like a hospitalized movie character who only pretends to take their medicine... they'd pretend to eat the bread at communion... but would discreetly slip it into a shirt or pocket... and bring it home... and put it away somewhere safe... then... if anyone got sick... they could offer it up as a divine and healing medicine... or if the crops weren't doing so well... they could bury it in the field... like cosmic fertilizer...

In our Protestant communion services... we emphasize real presence over transubstantiation or consubstantiation... please see me later if you have any questions... we emphasize the real presence that comes... as Jesus said... when two or three are gathered together in his name... it is half Mystery and half Mystery... it rises out of our collective consciousness... we don't fully understand it... but we trust that promise as true...

So what about the magic of baptism... spiritual cleansing with water pre-dates Christianity... the Hebrew word *mikveh* literally means *any gathering of waters*... but was specifically used in Jewish law for the waters of ritual immersion... some sources say the building of the *mikveh* was so important in ancient times it was said to take precedence over the construction of a synagogue... immersion was so important that it occurred before the high Priest conducted the service on the Day of Atonement...

before the regular priests participated in the Temple service... before each person entered the Temple complex...

In the Episcopal and Lutheran churches... our traditions recognize the right of any Christian to baptize in an emergency... though it must then be reported and recorded... but generally... priests and pastors baptize... because we baptize in community... not privately... we baptize in community... with the understanding that we are all connected... we are all members of the body of Christ... and with the realization that being a Christian is hard work... and when we walk The Way with others... we are supported... and we can learn so much more when we share our stories... and it can even be fun... we baptize in community... because we can't have accountability without community... and we can't have community without accountability... we baptize in community... because if there's any magic... it rises out of the group consciousness that comes from being gathered together... with one mind... and one purpose...

Lutherans and Episcopalians are in agreement... that a sacrament is an outward and visible sign... of an inward and spiritual grace... what we do on the outside... the liturgy we enact... this rite of passage... reflects something that happens to us on the inside... for us Christians... water baptism is our public acknowledgment that we die to our old myopic selves... and are reborn as a part of something incomprehensibly larger than we are... and I believe that it is by God's grace... that we come to experience something larger than ourselves... something beyond ourselves... a Mystery that brings both joy and what is called *the fear of the Lord*... which also means knowing who we are... and knowing who we're not... but as they say... be careful what you wish for...

I've shared this quote before... but think Annie Dillard said it so well: *Why do people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute... does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke... or... as I suspect... does no one believe a word of it... it is madness to wear straw hats or velvet hats to church... we should all be wearing crash helmets... ushers should issue life*

*preservers and signal flares... they should lash us to our pews... for the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense... or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return...*

I don't think Annie means we'll pass through the Stargate and never be able to get back to Earth... I think she means that when we engage the Living God... and open ourselves up to Emmanuel... to the God within us... when we experience the deep connection that we all share... when we reject the divisions between us as lies... when we heal multi-generational dysfunction... when we begin to experience how what we think... say... and do... affects our neighbor and God's creation... when we live into the real potential for which we were created... that's the real magic... and we'll be changed so much... that we can never return to who we were before...

The baptismal death and rebirth into which we're invited... helps keep us honest... it's like the new birth at AA meetings where everyone knows each other's absolutely worst secret... so it doesn't matter what else people know about them...

And this new birth helps keeps us honest with ourselves... helps keep us from telling lies to ourselves... or to others... about why we do what we do... helps move us away from considering only ourselves to considering others and all of creation... keeps us from rationalizing our selfish behavior... one commentator I read claims that our deepest human sin... is being able to rationalize just about anything to ourselves... and trying to rationalize just about anything to others...

The death and rebirth into which we're invited... is reflected in today's lectionary... and reflects the priceless gift of free will that God has given to us... in Deuteronomy... *See... I have set before you this day... life and prosperity... death and adversity... I call on heaven and earth to bear witness... that I have empowered you to make these choices... choose life... so that you and your descendants may live...*

And in the reading of the Gospel... we hear some pretty strong language... *Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother... wife and children... brothers and sisters... yes... and even life itself... cannot be my disciple... hate is a pretty strong word here... would a God of love tell us that in order to love her... we must hate those who love us...*

But we have to remember that at this time... family didn't just come first... family was just about all there was... and I think this passage has been misunderstood... because in the Greek... *mih - say*... the word that's translated as hate... also means... to love less... so this passage may make more sense when we read it as... *Whoever comes to me and does not love father and mother... their families... and yes... and even life itself... less than they love me... cannot be my disciple...*

And you see... this ties right back to first of the Two Great Commandments... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... and with all your soul... and with all your mind... not your family more... but God more... so today's Gospel helps us choose life...

But there is also a cost... as the Gospel says... choosing life isn't easy... when we listen to God within us... the world will expect us to listen to it... when we seek Oneness and Reconciliation with each other... the world will expect us to choose division and accusation... when we speak truth to power... the world will try to silence us...

Further... the Gospel translation says: *None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions*. But the Greek word for possessions... also means advantage... so none of us can become disciples unless we give up our advantage... our power... our privilege... but this dying to self... is a small cost... for enlightenment and eternal life...

Heather and Brandon... Lacy and Eric... the promises you make today... on behalf of Porter... and the ones that Megan and Jason have agreed to make... are significant promises... they will help him choose life... you're agreeing to model the Christian life for him... to help form him in his life in Christ... to help him experience what a unique and precious child of God he is... and to help him keep that preciousness in perspective... that doesn't mean you'll need to have all the answers... it doesn't mean you'll need to be perfect... but it does mean that you... and this community which witnesses your vows and renews its own... and the community in which he is raised... will need to help him turn back to God when he strays... as we all do...

And we pray... that one day he will come to know here [head] and feel here [heart]... that he is inextricably connected to all of creation... that his part in the body of Christ is indispensable... and that even though he is both saint and sinner... he could not be folded into God's love any more than he already is... or be redeemed more thoroughly than he will be... and for that we say: Thanks be to God...

Mike+