

Baptism – Trinity Sunday

May 31, 2015

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One of my good friends is a lawyer. He told me that after working a few years in a large law firm, he decided to hang up his own shingle. At the same time he decided to open his own office, he resolved that he would only practice “Happy Law”, No divorces, no criminal defendants. He was going to be the lawyer who did closing on houses or handled the law for adoptions. People adopting a child or buying a house are happy, and sometimes they need a lawyer.

Right now, Christ Church is experiencing the religious equivalent of “Happy Law.” In a period of less than two weeks, we will have celebrated two weddings and a baptism. “Happy Church.”

Even after all these years, I still love doing weddings and I love them for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is the Book of Common Prayer. I get embarrassed when at the wedding reception people come up to me and tell me what a beautiful service I did. I tell them that I read pretty well for a kid my age. I love the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage; the language is exquisite.

“Dearly Beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony.”

I LOVE the words! I love the way that it sounds. One of my favorite prayers is in the Marriage Rite:

“Make their life together a sign of Christ’s love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair. Amen.”

Marriage is about love: Deep > profound > sacred > love.

“Caroline, will you have this man to be your husband; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?” “I will.”

The Prayer book’s understanding of marriage, the Christian understanding of marriage is that of a Covenant relationship “not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly but reverently, deliberately and in accordance with the purpose for which it was instituted by God.” A good marriage is “a sign of Christ’s love to this sinful and broken world.”

I get chided about over using that phrase “sinful and broken world.” But the contemporary, worldly view of love as emotional, romantic and provisional is at odds with the Christian view of love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.” (I Cor.13) Jesus’ command to us is simple and pure: “This I command you, to love one another.”(John 15) The love Jesus has in mind is total and unconditional. “Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15) Twenty-one centuries later such devotion has gone out of style. The tenor of the age is to be sophisticated. The worse character flaw is to be naïve or unhip. In our super-sophisticated world, nothing is to be taken too seriously and so we wind up with reality TV programs like, ‘Married at First Sight’. We are so sophisticated that we politely accept cohabitation, what used to be called

“shacking up”, because we understand that some people are wary of commitment and the world says, “Well that’s okay,” because anyone who is too committed, too hopeful, too faithful is suspected of being simple at heart, at best, or simple minded, at worst. Super sophistication of this sort, is in the words of the author and Christian social critic, Jedidiah Purdy, nothing more than, “Pre-emptive despair.” The world has given up hope that: you can love God, or anything else with all of your heart, will all of your mind and with all of your strength. The world believes that you cannot, or at least, you should not; believe anything or anyone totally, completely and absolutely, to take up your cross and to follow.

Today, David and Justine brought their Son, Lawson, to be baptized. Baptism is the antithesis and the remedy for pre-emptive despair. The promises made at baptism *are* total, complete and absolute.

“Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?”

Do you put your whole trust in His grace and love?

Do you promise to follow and obey Him as your Lord? “

The answer for those seeking baptism is an unequivocal, “*I do.*”

The world understands if you back away from your commitments. But, in the church we ask and expect total commitment to the one who was totally committed to your salvation unto death, Jesus Christ, our Savior. This is not stern religion in the pejorative sense. It is stern religion in that it will brook no compromise for your soul. Jesus wants you totally. The Christian who walks in faith, hope and love: Believes what God has revealed; Hopes for the final triumph of Jesus; Loves God and those for whom Jesus died. The Christianity of faith, hope and love is scorned by the world as

terribly passé’ and unhip. The world teaches “faith” with one hand on your wallet. The world teaches “hope” with an insurance plan and a good lawyer. The world teaches “love” that fulfills me first or else it is abandoned. Christianity teach faith that one must lose his life to find it. Christianity teaches hope that God will wipe away every tear. Christianity teaches that God is love.

Young couples get married filled with love, faith in each other and hope for the future. The church asks for total commitment of one to the other, “*Forsaking all others... as long as you both shall live.*” It is what marriage was intended to be when it was instituted by God. Even more in baptism, our commitment to Jesus Christ goes beyond death into eternity. Jesus wants to be with you, abide with you, now and always. For you, He gave his life. Jesus wants your total commitment and unfaltering conviction: To believe in Him; to hope in Him; to love Him. Jesus will not disappoint you because He already loves you. If that does not make you happy, I do not know what will.

Amen.