

“Glorious Day”
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What a Glorious Day! Today we baptize Lucy Williams McClain; congratulations to James and Anna McClain. Such a wonderful occasion deserves a story.

Two Philosophers who also happened to be parents were debating religion. Philosopher #1 states, “I will not impose my religion on my children. When they are grown they can decide for themselves what they want to believe. Philosopher #2 paused for a moment of thought. Then, much to the surprise of Philosopher #1, Philosopher #2 invites him to visit his garden. When they arrive at the garden of Philosopher #1, Philosopher #2 remarks, “This is not a garden. This is a field of weeds!” Philosopher #2 explains, “Oh, it is a garden. It is just that I did not want to impose ideas of what a garden should be, so I let it decide and this is how it turned out.”

Last week, in the Bishop’s Town Hall meeting, Bishop Mark made the statement that often the question posed by society to Christians is no longer whether Christianity is true but whether Christianity is good. I am sure that, as the Bishop pointed out, the question about the goodness of Christianity comes at least superficially from a profound lack of knowledge about Christianity other than sensational headlines about scandals and misconduct of some of its members. Yet, I am sure Bishop Mark would agree that there is something more going on than just Christianity getting a lot of bad press. It goes much deeper. Professor Ron Highfield points out that especially among the young adults of society; the God of the Bible seems to be a threat to human dignity and human freedom.

The Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy warns: “For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.” Like Philosopher #1 who will not impose his religious belief on his children, (And yes, I have had people say this to me.) There is the belief that human dignity is diminished any time human autonomy is restrained. Anything that speaks of moral code of obedience sounds oppressive and judgmental. I won’t ask you to raise your hands but I will ask rhetorically how many of you have seen on the internet or on a bumper sticker: “Question Authority.” Now, how many have seen on the internet or a bumper sticker: “Submit to legitimate Authority”. I’m guessing many for column A and no one for column B.

Consider that the Bible begins not just with the creation of everything but also with the ordering of everything created, the sun to rule the day, the moon to rule the night, and the dry land separated from the water. Human beings are given dominion over a creation that is ordered by the Creator. We are free, but there are necessary limits to our freedom, limits that are provided by a loving God who want better things for us than we can desire or pray for. We are free, but we can pray with the Psalmist, “Oh, how I love your law!” We are free, but at your Baptism we swear to accept Jesus as our Savior, to put our whole trust in his grace and love, and to follow and obey him as our Lord.

We have set before Lucy an ordered life that has meaning and purpose. God created Lucy to love her and to have her know the joy of loving God. Sadly, Lucy will be told that the Christianity she has accepted is not good, that it will limit her freedom. But, what restrictions have we asked of her? To persevere in resisting evil, to repent of any transgression she may commit, to love her neighbor as herself, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. True, we have set limits to Lucy’s freedom in asking her to make this covenant. However, as someone once said, gravity limits what we can do, but without it we cannot dance!

Christianity-- our faith, our belief, our relationship with God, our prayers, our worship--all that goes into Christianity is not just good, it is the greatest gift we can bestow upon our children. Let me say a little about our gratitude for this gift of faith, how we teach our children to be grateful for it. Virginia author, Mark Mitchell, uses the metaphor of a priceless heirloom to make this point; I borrow from him.

Let us suppose for her 21st birthday, Lucy receives a priceless heirloom, a ring or a necklace, which has been in the family for generations, cared for by the women of the family for as long as memory serves. To receive such a treasure gratefully is to take upon oneself the responsibility of what has been inherited. One would say to receive such a gift and to throw it in a drawer or to try to sell it on E-bay would show a high level of ingratitude. Few would argue if it was described as a moral failure.

Today, Christ Episcopal Church bestowed upon Lucy the most precious gift we have to offer – membership in this branch of the church and adoption into our family. We hope and pray she will accept this gift with gratitude. Gratitude she will learn from Anna and James. Responsibility she will learn from all of you who swore to support her in her life in Christ. May the God who has given us the grace to will a faithful life in Christ give us the grace to accomplish it. Amen.