

It's a great day for a Baptism. Welcome Mary Emma Frances and David Reed. Events like today's starts one thinking about how wonderful it is to come to church as a child. I do not know if this is true, but I heard a sermon once which told of how, in colonial times, the Puritan ushers carried a long staff with a big knob on one end and a feather on the other. The staff was used during multi-hour church services. I was told that if a man started to nod off during an overly long sermon, the Puritan usher would whack the head of the dozing churchman. For somnolent women, the ushers would use the more subtle feather to awaken the drowsy lady.

At Christ Church, we do not whack or tickle, at any time during the service. We do, however, use social pressure to limit unruly behavior. Anyone talking too loud or whose cell phone starts to ring, will receive a deadly glance from those around them – anyone, except for children.

Children fall asleep in church all of the time. They talk, and mumble and chatter. They might dance in the aisle during hymn singing. They color or draw, using kneelers for seats and pews for desks. They get snacks, or a bottle, some even nurse during service. Children might come to church dressed as cheerleaders, cowboys, fairy princesses or pirates. I once good humoredly asked a woman at church if her children had any clothes, or do they just have costumes?

Children are a wonderful gift to a church because they come to church without pretension. They come to the Lord, just as they are.

As for children dressing up as pirates to attend church: the Episcopal Church has a long history with pirates. It's a fairly well established fact that at least part of Trinity Church Wall Street was built using the runner and tackle from the sailing ship owned by

Captain Kidd. I read a book about Captain Kidd last summer, and I know more about pirates than I cared to know. But one bit of pirate lore I found fascinating was pirate dress. Pirates wore the most outlandish outfits – frilled shirts, large hats with curly-haired wigs, gold buttons, large leather boots. Think Captain Hook, in "Peter Pan", whose outfit mimicked the attire of the English monarch, King Charles II.

There was a purpose behind the pretension of pirate outfits. They dressed like that to make a point. For most of history, the common people lived under oppressive laws made by the ruling class. These included fashion laws. Among the articles of clothing forbidden to commoners were, gold buttons, shoe buckles, ermine collars, even certain colors of clothing were reserved for the ruling class. This was regardless of one's ability to buy these items. The pretension lay not with the pirate outlaw, but with the law-abiding nobility who decreed that certain styles of dress must be withheld for their exclusive use.

We may enter the world without pretension, but somewhere in our maturing process into adulthood, every one of us will attempt to gain a privilege or advantage over those around us.

You may be thinking that you are the humblest of human beings. Then, you are sitting in the DMV for an hour, waiting to get your license renewed and you read in the paper, as you sit and wait, about the Beverly Hills DMV, which has a special entrance for celebrities so that they do not have to wait with common folk. Those of us old enough to remember the oil embargo of the early '70's may recall waiting in long lines to buy gas on even or odd numbered days – then reading about congressmen and senators who sent staff members to wait in line for them.

Those of you lucky enough to own a Lear jet do not know the fun the rest of us enjoy, going through airport security and you will never get stuck for seven hours on the tarmac like those JetBlue passengers we read about this week.

There is enormous temptation for us to grasp for privileges others cannot attain, to jealously guard the few prerogatives we have. If you understand what I have been talking about these last few minutes, then perhaps you now better understand the division that Baptism brings to light.

Like the pirates I mentioned earlier, the pretension was not with the pirates but with the nobility who passed laws making certain styles their exclusive right. The division of baptism comes from those who do not want to recognize the equality this sacrament pronounces on all of us.

Baptism does not tolerate or recognize any distinction among the baptized. It does not matter whether you are being baptized in the font in the chapel of Windsor Castle with princes in attendance or being submersed on the shores of Lake Malawi in Africa surrounded by the people of your village. In Baptism we are all equal in the eyes of God without rank, distinction or privilege.

In Baptism we are all equally loved by our Heavenly Father. We are all equally redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ. We are all equally nurtured and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And nothing is more foreign to our sinful selves that all of this equality.

A Baptized Christian must accept this equality and respect the dignity of every human being. Any Christian seeking to establish himself or herself as great must become the least. Any Christian wanting to be a leader must become a servant

I heard this a few years ago at a ministry conference: when I was a member of the Diocesan Commission on Ministry, interviewing people who wanted to become priests or deacons. In one such exchange, a person was asked by a Deacon why they wanted to be ordained. How would being ordained help them in their ministry? The person said, if they were ordained, people would look up and see a white collar and know that he was a minister. The Deacon told this person that people would know he was a minister not by looking up and seeing a white collar, but by looking down and seeing him wash their feet.

In the church we are all equal except for the leaders who are our servants.

Which is why I like the idea of being a child in church. Children only see a bunch of people: some old, some young; some short, some tall; some male, some female – but without any pretense that any one of them is better than the other. It's a good way to be in church.

And with God's help, it is a good way to be a Christian in the world.

Amen.