

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
January 13, 2019 8 am
The Reverend Rick Veit

Congratulations to Amy and Jason Duke on this day of their baptism. They have completed what I would consider the first part of their training. We spent about six hours together learning about the Episcopal Church, what is the American wing of the Anglican Church, or the Church of England. We learned about the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, Theology, Church History, Ethics, Worship, Prayer, Sacraments, which are??? They are an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

In the Eucharist, the outward and visible sign is....bread and wine. No matter what faith you are or no faith at all, we can all prove that in Communion there is bread and wine. However, when they are blessed by a priest, they change. The bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, the fullness of Christ.

In Baptism, the outward and visible sign is...water. Again, no matter what faith you are or no faith at all, by splashing around back at the entrance of the nave, we will all know that water is being used. It can be proven. However, when blessed by a priest, the water becomes holy water. That is the water that I will use on Amy and Jason. You will be washed clean and ready for your new life in Christ. You will become full members in the body or the community of Christ. And you will be marked as Christ's own forever. No matter what you do or who you become after this moment of baptism - And I would suggest you do not go on a dark path or do really bad things – No matter what you do or who you become, you will ALWAYS have Christ, the love of Christ, in you...always.

In fact, if you get nothing else out of this sermon and this liturgy today, know that you are loved, the beloved, and know that God is well pleased with you. It is an unconditional love as well. The Greek word used for “beloved” in the Bible today is Agapetos. It means unconditional. There is eros love, which is romance and passion. There is philo love, or sibling or friendship love. Philo-delphia, city of brotherly love. These two versions of love can ebb and flow based upon worldly events. You may or may not feel passionate or romantic towards someone. Friendships can dissolve sometimes. But agape love is indissoluble. It never ends, just like your baptism. You are marked as Christ's own forever.

You are loved. You are the beloved. And God is well pleased with you. You heard a call from God to become part of this Christ-centered movement and you stepped up to become full members. Members of what??

...Members of a community that tries to counter anything bad in the world. We call that Satan, wickedness, evil, all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God.

...Members of a community that tries to fulfill and live into everything right in the world. We call that following Jesus Christ as Savior, placing your whole trust in his grace and love, and promising to follow and obey him as your Lord. But what does that mean?

It means that you will care for those in need, especially the outcast and those rejected in our world. Ponder for a moment who are the people who are most rejected? Maybe women...perhaps people who are gay or transgendered...maybe immigrants, or children, particularly those who are orphaned or in need of adoption...maybe it is people who have been or are in the middle of divorce...maybe it is those who have been furloughed and are trying to pay their bills...or maybe it is President Trump, maybe he is in most need, or members of Congress. If you are to care for them, pray for them by name. Learn about their specific needs as humans in need, and then love them unconditionally. Maybe you are to love those who are homeless, adults, teenagers, children. Maybe you are to love the people who do the worst things in the world.

When you begin your life in Christ, your life of unconditional love, you love and care for all people, all creation, especially those in great need, the outcast of our world. You continue to follow these teachings. And just like in marriage or any relationship, you spend your life figuring out what it means to love. You continue in this community, breaking bread together, praying and worshipping together, proclaiming, or preaching, by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. And, as Francis of Assisi once taught us, use words only when necessary. When you live out your life in Christ, you seek and serve Christ in ALL persons, loving your neighbor as yourself. You have to love yourself as well. You, we are all God's beautiful creation, warts and all.

This is all in your upcoming examination, by the way.

In continuing your life in Christ, you strive for justice and peace among ALL people, and respect the dignity of every human being, especially the ones that are most difficult to respect.

And your response in all of this is??? – I will..with God's help. You never have to do all of this on your own.

Now, are you sure that you don't want to back out now? This new life in Christ requires you, as Jesus once said, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as you would yourself. They are known as the two great commandments.

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And now, we walk together, in this new life of Christ. And, by the way, anyone who is here today, anyone who enters this community, begins to become part of this family. In other words, just by your presence here today, you are treated as family. Just by your presence here today, you are loved and God is well pleased with you. If you want to continue in this life in Christ, give me a call sometime. The only requirement is that you serve and love all people, especially those in great need, the outcast, those who are rejected. All you have to do is love unconditionally!! That is all. And when you are part of the Christ-centered community, it is always with God's help. You do not have to do it on your own.

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