

The funny thing about Episcopalians is that they like to sing all the verses... and that's a good thing today because our hymns have a lot to say to us; the music is joyful and the words help us to understand what we hear in scripture, what we pray in words, what we see in baptism, and what we experience when we come to the Eucharist. So for our visitors today, pick up a hymnal and join in the fun!

*O day of radiant gladness* is a joyful hymn celebrating Sunday, the day that we remember for the creation of light, the resurrection of our Lord, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. And today is made even more joyful as we baptize Zoey and Christopher Hansson and welcome them into the household of God. It is joyful not just because they are cute and adorable, which they are, but because they will become children of God. As children of God they will be reborn by the Holy Spirit, given a new life of grace, and share with us in the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

All those are big concepts and somewhat intangible so it helps when we sing *Shall we gather at the river* to celebrate just what those promised benefits of baptism really mean. In baptism we are joined with all the saints who have gone before us, not just the martyrs and the holy people who are examples for us of what it means to follow Christ but for all those who have touched our lives however briefly and whom we only know through history. This hymn also expresses our longing that we will be able to rejoice together in the life to come, a life where we will be able to experience God in peace.

If you listen closely you will notice there's a lot of "we"s and not a lot of "I"s in this hymn. This reminds us that baptism is a community affair. You can't be a Christian alone. And if there is anything calculated to challenge our spiritual growth and development, it's life in community. Families have their own challenges but learning to come together to worship, to pray, to work, and in fellowship exposes so many vulnerabilities, so many foibles, ...what you think I'm kidding, just look around at us! At the same time life in community also provides a space for us to develop and grow new skills and new strengths, to draw support from one another as we come together in to serve God in the world.

The letter to the Ephesians is all about what it takes to live in community and saying "we are members of one another" while admitting that life is not all rainbows and unicorns. We all know that right? Right? Anger has its place, but it needs to be processed. Smoldering anger opens the door to sin – but more about that in a moment. Even thieves are encouraged to work so that they have something to share with the needy which is certainly an interesting twist on why any of us should take up gainful employment. Suggestions to avoid gossip and backbiting in favor of kindness and forgiveness are downright practical as well as deeply spiritual and a valid today as they were back then.

Our baptismal covenant creates the framework for our life together as Christians. The baptismal covenant includes not only the Apostles' Creed, that ancient statement of our core beliefs about the Holy Trinity, the Church, and our hope for salvation, but also 5 promises about what we will do in order to fulfill our responsibilities as members of the Body of Christ. First we are to participate in the life of the community, its worship, its teaching, and its fellowship. Second we are to repent and ask for forgiveness whenever we screw up. This is not just about sins of a personal nature, but getting caught up in things that lead to evil on a so societal basis –

all those “isms” we slip into because everyone else does it, the jokes, the stereotypes, the exclusion of those who are different from us. Third, we are to show whose we are not just by our words but by our behavior, although these days it might be harder to claim our Christian identity than to simply do a good deed. Fourth we are to see the face of Christ in everyone and believe me that’s a stretch. The good news is that we have a lifetime to practice, and practice, and practice. Lastly, we are to work for justice and peace, beautiful expressed in the mission statement of the Episcopal Church: *to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.*

These are challenging promises, and we express our hope to be able to fulfill them when we sing *I want to walk as a child of the light*. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, a light to guide Zoey and Christopher as they grow, a light for us all as we navigate the course of our lives. Fortunately, since being human we can get lost trying to follow Jesus, we are also assured that Jesus is there to support us when we get lost or stuck, or, as happens sometimes, when we need a boot in the rear.

Moreover it is the responsibility of everyone here, but particularly of the parents and godparents, to model for these new little Christians just what it means to follow Jesus. On behalf of these children you will promise to turn to Jesus and accept him as your savior, you will promise to trust in his grace and love, and you will promise to follow and obey him as your Lord, and you do these things by becoming an active part of Christian community.

Our gospel is taken from the passage in which Jesus proclaims himself the bread of life, that those who come to him will never be hungry and those who believe in him will never be thirsty, and finally that those who eat this bread will live forever. It’s an offer that is hard to refuse so what could be more appropriate than the hymn *I am the bread of life* for our Communion hymn? The words of this hymn bring us even more deeply into what Jesus is saying to us in our gospel. In the end, to believe is not just to accept something as a fact or that it can be proven as a fact it is to hold it in our hearts and to act as if we know it to be true, thereby making it real. This underscores the old adage that “praying shapes believing” which means that prayer and worship lead to belief. Most of us wrestle with doubts, some of us because of the challenges of life, others of us because we can’t quite let go of our need for tangible proof, and still others of us because our pride won’t let us acknowledge our dependence on God. That’s where prayer and worship and orienting our lives towards God makes such a difference, eventually we come to believe. And it is God who draws us there since no one can come to Jesus unless drawn by the Father. So Zoey and Christopher you will be baptized because God has drawn you here, drawn you to this place and this time, among these people, as they themselves have been drawn.

This joy in our life in Christ comes to a crescendo in that triumphal hymn *Lift high the cross* as we rejoice in Jesus’ incarnation, his sacrifice on the cross, and then his rising again. But back down here on earth we need to remember that God’s ways are not our ways. We worship a God who by the measure of the world was a failure. He was rejected by his people and he was tortured and killed by the authorities. Nevertheless no earthly authority could stop his rising again or the spread of his message of love. Following Jesus does not promise an easy life but rather one in which no matter what hardships, disappointments, and rejection we suffer in his

name, Jesus is right there with us. And that's the love of Christ, that's the love of a God who so loved the world that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life, and that is the love with which we welcome Zoey and Christopher into our community.

Amen!