

Wednesday, February 17, 2016
Psalm 133 and Acts 2:37-47

In holy baptism we are invited and called into a relationship with God and also with the church, which is none other than the people - us. In the waters of baptism, God enters into a covenant with us. It is God who acts and a covenant is much more than simply a contract. A contract can generally be broken by one party or the other. It can be rendered null and void; however, a covenant God enters will never be broken from God's end. The covenant God makes with us in our baptism is one God will never relinquish control of, never sever, never deem null and void no matter how many times we may turn from God and try to go it alone in our journey of faith. A covenant establishes a relationship and with that relationship comes the promises that will go with us a lifetime. Promises freely given through the death and resurrection of our dear Lord. Promises of God's unconditional love, forgiveness, and eternal life that in the words of the Apostle Paul, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Romans 8:38-39)

Baptism is not something to be taken for granted. It's not simply a one-time act but rather it is part of the very fabric we cling to as God's children. Luther often referred to the sacrament of baptism as a most precious thing. In fact, in his Large

Catechism, he writes, “Baptism is of divine origin, not something devised or invented by men ... it is instituted by God himself. ... Here (in baptism) stand God’s Word and command which have been instituted, established, and confirmed. What God institutes and commands cannot be useless ... it is a most precious thing. ... To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men but by God himself.” (Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, p. 81; Fortress Press, 1959)

Over the course of the next five Wednesday’s we will explore more fully this covenantal relationship God calls us in to. What does it look like? How do we live that out? We already talked about the promises God makes through His Son and confers to us in the sacrament of baptism. But we make promises to as parents for our children, as sponsors for God-children, as a congregation, or as adults if baptized later in life. Those undergoing the process of catechism or as we know it better today, confirmation, are studying, learning, and preparing to affirm their baptism. They will say “yes” to the promises God made to them and in the process they will say “yes” to continuing in that covenantal relationship through declaring five intentions: to live among God’s faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

Some nights my reflection might be a bit longer, like tonight, or shorter. Some evenings we will reflect silently while others we might share in some guided discussion.

Whatever it is we do, we do it together united in He who holds us together – Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and we do it together trusting He is with us and is guiding us, teaching us, and helping us live out our baptismal identity and calling: individually and as a community of faith.

Our two passages truly reveal something about living among the community of God's faithful. It is a most blessed gift and joy that we are invited into the church; although, don't we all take it for granted at various times in our lives, say it will be there when we need it, find every excuse in the book why we can't go, or simply choose to live out our faith journey alone. Those first disciples and converts saw the need for community. Jesus had just ascended to be with His Father in heaven and had breathed on them the gift of the Holy Spirit to be His presence among them. Can you imagine just what they were thinking, feeling, experiencing? How would they move onward? They found the strength, the ability, and their mission as God's people joined together in community. Did they have struggles? Most certainly as the early church faced many challenges and Paul writes of many divisions. Did they have arguments and hurt one another? Of course they did. Yet, it is in the community of the faithful the risen Christ most clearly reveals Himself in the world. This 40 days of Lent is certainly a time to individually pause, reflect, and draw closer to God but it is also a season in which we find strength, comfort, and hope through one another as we journey toward the cross of Christ. While we can certainly draw closer to God alone we also draw closer to him in

community where He meets us through one another, through our worship of Him, through education, and through meals like the one we just shared.

One of the things those who are shut-in, homebound, in a nursing home, in an extended stay in a hospital or for some other reason simply can't be at church tell me most often is they miss community. They miss coming to worship. They miss the people. They miss quilting. They miss being a part of something bigger than they are. They miss the singing. They miss the fellowship. They miss praying together. They miss living among God's faithful people. They miss the joy that comes with that and they long to have that once again. They miss the strength, comfort, hope, and presence of God found in being together with the wonderful people of God. To live among God's faithful people...not always easy; after all, none of us are perfect. Therefore, the church is full of a bunch of sinners yet the church is also a true privilege, joy, and gift to be part of because it is where God gathers us in...sins and all...and then calls all of us saints and reassures us of His great love for us and that nothing will ever separate us from that love! Amen.