

My Loving and Nurturing Mom, the Baptist

C-Eph 1, Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Robert Woody (1/13/2019)

Children's Sermon

Do you remember when you were baptized? Do you remember all the promises made by your parents and Godparents and everyone who was here the day you got baptized to support you in your life journey with Christ? They all made lots of promises to support you.

At your baptism, your parents and Godparents promised they would bring you up "in the Christian faith and life," and through their prayers and guidance help you to grow up to be like Jesus. And all the people who were present promised to "do all in [their] power to support [you] in [your] life in Christ." Everybody out there has committed to loving you and helping you live a good Christian life.

Have they kept their promises? Well your parents keep bringing you to church. And some of the people out there have been teaching you and other kids Sunday School, and preparing things for our worship services, and preparing breakfast and snacks after church so we can hang out together and get to know each other. And many of them also make donations to the church so we can have a staff and pay the utility bills and take care of our buildings. This is going to happen for the rest of your lives. God is going to continue to find people, parents, brothers and sisters, friends, fellow church members who can keep caring for you, and teaching you, and supporting you in your Christian life journey.

But there's **another part** to God's plan. God wants you, each of you, to do the same thing. God wants you to do your best to **love** your parents and brothers and sisters and your friends and neighbors, so you can help them have a good Christian life. If we focus just on ourselves, instead of others, we might have a lot of stuff and be rich, but we won't be happy. But if your family and friends love and support you, and you love and support them, you will **all** have a good and abundant life. That's the goal of the Church.

The more we love others, the more we will feel loved by God. And the more we ignore others; the less we will feel loved by God. So if you want a happy, fruitful life what should you do? Focus on loving your family, and loving your friends, and loving your neighbors.

Adult Sermon:

Jesus clearly had an Epiphany, a moment of spiritual awakening, when he was baptized. Up to that point, he had done very little in terms of his role as "Messiah." According to the

Gospels, he was an active carpenter. He had no religious followers or disciples. At that point, we have no evidence that he'd ever preached a sermon or healed a sick person.

But when John the Baptist, immersed him in the water of a river, and he rose up from the water, Jesus had an "Epiphany." He heard God's voice from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." From that point forward, (in part, thanks to John the Baptist,) his life turned around dramatically. He began to experience God's presence intensely, and to lead and teach and heal his disciples and the crowds.

Baptism in our Episcopal tradition, has some similarities **and** some differences from Jesus' baptism. We baptize mostly babies and children. And when we do so, we, all who are present, make promises to guide and lead the child being baptized into a deeply spiritual life. The parents and Godparents promise to "[bring] the child up in the Christian faith and life," and "help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ." BCP p. 302 *[If you are not familiar with our baptismal liturgy, pull out the red prayer book and go to p. 302]*

All of us who are present at the baptism promise to "do all in [our] power to support [this child] in their life in Christ." BCP p. 303 And then we **reaffirm** our own Baptismal Covenant and say more prayers for the child being baptized to live an abundant life.

Jesus heard God's voice through his baptism, led by John the Baptist. And we all hear the voice of God through our parents, Godparents, and all our fellow Christians, who have promised to help support and guide our Spiritual Journeys. There are many ways we can help support one another in our spiritual journeys.

We can be **Lay Eucharistic Ministers** who go and regularly see our fellow Reconcilers in nursing homes and hospitals who are unable to attend worship. We can be members of our **Altar Guild** who prepare our altar and prepare the elements of our Eucharist so we can come together around our altar to experience Christ's presence through bread and wine. We can be part of our **Landscape Team** who keep our grounds and especially our court yard so beautiful, that we often encounter our Creator on our campus. The first time I walked upon this campus, and stepped into the courtyard, when I was being considered as a candidate for the rector position, something changed. I felt God's presence in the beauty of our campus. One of the reasons we are such a **close spiritual family** is because of our **Breakfast Teams**, and **Coffee Hour Teams** who create a time and space where we can come together and get to know each other and stay connected.

There are many other ways here at Rec that many of you love and support each other. We do all these things to carry out our Baptismal Covenant; to "do all in (our) power to support (all our brothers and sisters) in their Life in Christ."

As parents and Godparents, we also have taken on intense responsibilities for helping to nurture and shape the life of our kids and Godkids. Throughout our kids' life journey, we are called to be like John the Baptist – to do things to help lead and guide our children and

Godchildren, that will enable them to **discover** and continue to **experience** God and Jesus in their life journey. We have all promised to do this throughout their life journey, as long as we are here with them.

That's why I'm wearing this **red stole** on a Sunday I should be wearing a **white one**. My mom, Joanna, a lifetime Baptist, helped support me and nurtured me in my own Spiritual Journey, throughout her life; literally until the day she died. I told this story in a sermon 15 years ago. I'm sure you remember it.

My Mom fully supported me throughout my spiritual journey, even though I had left the Baptist Church and become a fairly progressive Episcopalian, who did a lot of things Baptist thought were sinful.

This is the red stole I wore at my ordination to become Episcopal priest. My Baptist Mom made it. Baptist don't wear stoles. She had never made one before, but she made one to **support me** in my new Episcopal adventure. And she was there for my ordination as a priest in June of 2000. **[photo]** I can't tell you how affirmed and supported I felt as a new Episcopal priest when my mom, the Baptist, made my ordination stole and came to my ordination.

For some reason my Mom realized that her job was not to try to keep me in her Baptist traditions and beliefs. Her job was to help me fulfill the specific call that **I was hearing** from God.

Eight months later, Mom was diagnosed with acute Leukemia and spent most of the next 4 months in the hospital going through several rounds of chemotherapy. One time, when she was about to start another round, my Mom asked me **to anoint her**. Why would she do that? Baptist don't do anointings. She had never been anointed. My Mom wanted her son, a new Episcopal priest to anoint her. I am sure we all hoped for healing, but I'm also sure mom, even as she was suffering, wanted to continue to affirm and support me, her son, who was a brand new Episcopal priest. I went and found some oil and blessed the oil. And then our family, all Baptists, except for me, gathered around her bed, and I anointed her with oil and we prayed for her.

After several rounds of chemo, the doctors decided it wasn't going to work, so Mom decided to go home to spend her last days. We spent as much time as we could with her. Julie loved my Mom. And Julie also felt so supported by Mom. In her last days, Mom was sleeping on a couch in the Family Room. In the middle of the day, Julie woke Mom up to give her a couple of Tylenol. Mom was feeling very weak, so Julie helped her sit up, put two pills in her mouth and gave her some water to drink. She laid back down. And then, suddenly, she sat up and said, "What did you just give me?" Julie said, "Tylenol." Mom said, "I thought it was communion." I was sitting nearby, so I said, "Mom do you want communion?" "Yes, I would like love that."

Baptists, every six months or so, do a simple communion with wafers and grape juice. Never wine. And they don't believe the bread and grape juice become, in any way, the body and blood of Christ. But Mom the Baptist, seemed to be deeply moved when I served her communion whenever she visited my Church in Tomball. So I got my brother to go get some red wine. (There was never any wine in my parents' house.) And I prepared some bread and the

wine. And we (all my Baptist family) did an Episcopal Eucharist, and I served Mom the Body and Blood of Christ. At the end of the Eucharist, Mom said, “I am ready to go now.”

We took her back to her bedroom and she died 36 hours later, on June 9th, 10 days before the first anniversary of my ordination.

My Mom blessed me and nurtured and supported me in so many ways throughout my life journey, as a child, a teen-ager, young adult, lawyer, and finally in my beginning days as an Episcopal priest. She never officially made the promises of our Episcopal Baptismal Covenant, to support me in my Christian journey. But she carried them out, she **encouraged** and **stretched** and **nurtured** me literally, until the day she died.

One of the ways Mom blessed and affirmed me was with these **three acts of blessing** – making my ordination stole and attending my ordination, asking me to anoint her in the hospital, and asking me to serve an Episcopal version of communion as she approached the hour of her death. In the deepest and most intimate levels, she affirmed and nurtured me to become a real Episcopal priest.

And then there’s Julie who has also been so supportive of my whacky Episcopal priest journey. She supported me spiritually in my 10 year discernment journey to leave being a lawyer and become an Episcopal priest. And then she supported our family **financially** when I quit my lawyer job and did three years of seminary, without any salary, and also in my first few years as an assistant priest when I wasn’t making enough for us to live on. And she has supported and followed me in my priesthood journey from Austin to Tomball and then Tomball to San Antonio. Julie, like my Mom, has been so supportive and nurturing of my priesthood journey. I would not be here without Julie.

We are all called to love and nurture each other on our Spiritual Journeys. Writing this sermon has reminded me of how much I need to intentionally, affirm and bless and nurture **my own sons**, as long as I am able. They no longer regularly attend Episcopal worship. But they both are deeply focused on following Jesus’ example of loving their neighbors, especially those who are struggling in our world, like immigrants. My job is not to convert them or get them to return to the Episcopal tradition. My job is to do all I can to affirm and support them in the journey they feel called to, like my Mom, the Baptist, did for me.

God uses all of us, like John the Baptist, as tools, resources, for helping others experience and serve our God. And we have all made promises in our Baptismal Covenants, which we frequently renew, to love and serve and support our kids and our fellow Christians in our life journeys.

We need to keep these promises, throughout our Life Journeys. And when we do so, our family and friends and neighbors will be deeply blessed. And so will we.

Amen