

## Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, April 6, 2016

Last Sunday, I had the privilege of baptizing seven youth who were part of this year's Pastor's Class. As I noted in the meditation that preceded their baptisms, they met with me for six weeks studying the life of Jesus, communion, baptism, and the church. They turned in homework assignments each week and paired up with Central's elders to do a service project and take communion to our members in assisted living centers. They read through Luke's Gospel and kept a reading journal of all 24 chapters. On Sunday, they followed the bagpipers and choir to the front of the sanctuary and sat together with their elder sponsors on the front row, eagerly anticipating their baptisms as newborn disciples of Jesus.



The youth and their families came to our home on Saturday for dinner. At the end of the evening, I gathered them in our family room and read aloud blessings I prepared for each of them based on their participation in Pastor's Class.

I share these blessings with you as a way of inviting your "deeper" appreciation for who these youth are and the gifts and graces they bring to Central.

Since there are seven blessings, this edition will be longer than the previous two-pagers you've received, but I assure you reading them will be worth your time.

Also, to preserve a measure of online privacy for minors, I am only using the youth's first names.

- Pastor David

## **Celia:**

I loved your personal additions at the top of your homework assignments like # ♥ **Church** and **Church rocks**. In my experience, Church does rock. There is no adventure, no challenge, nothing quite like following Jesus as one of his disciples. I hope you'll grow up to love the church, its people, and its Lord more and more with each passing year.

You, Pam Hammonds, and Brian Hughes visited Gay Brown on Palm Sunday and for your service project you cleaned and organized the Kids Central area in the basement. Thank you.

Among the three questions you asked were, *What does Christian mean?* and *What does it mean to be a Christian?*

Some have interpreted the word Christian – the Greek word *Christianos* -- to mean "a little Christ." But the best translation of *Christianos* is probably "a follower of Christ."

What it means to be a Christian is to follow Jesus in order to become like him. Celia, I hope that in following Jesus you will become like him and people will see in you "a little Christ" – that the grace, goodness, and life people saw in Jesus they will also see in you.

You also asked, *Is the Holy Spirit an angel?* No, the Holy Spirit is God. Most Christians believe in what is called The Holy Trinity. Namely, that God is made known to us in three ways: As the Father (the Creator of Heaven and Earth), the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Ghost (The Holy Spirit). All three are divine. All three are God. How can one be three? Some have said H<sub>2</sub>O (water) can be a liquid, a solid, or a vapor depending on whether it is water, ice or steam. Likewise, God is at the same time Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit-- Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

At your baptism, the Holy Spirit comes alongside you to guide and be with you always. God with you always, Celia!

## **Lorelei:**

You, Sara Moon, and Jim Cecil visited Frances Scott at Lexington Country Place on Palm Sunday. Sara wrote, "It was the best visit we've ever had with Frances. She loved seeing Lorelei!"

When asked, *Why did you decide to be part of the Pastor's Class this year?*, you answered: I want to learn more about God, Jesus, and the Bible. I hope you have. More importantly, I hope you will spend the rest of your life wanting to learn more about God, Jesus, and the Bible because the word *disciple* means *learner*.

Among the three questions you asked were, *Why do we take communion?* I trust you learned about communion on the night we studied it, but in sum, we take communion for three reasons:

- 1) To remember what Jesus did in the past during his earthly ministry.
- 2) To meet our risen Lord in the present with joy and thanksgiving. He's the host of the Lord's Supper every week.
- 3) To look forward to the future when Jesus comes again and God's purposes are fulfilled and we'll eat together at table in the kingdom of heaven.

You also asked, *Is God really his name?* No. To the best of our knowledge, though it's a holy mystery, God's name as revealed to Moses at the burning bush is *Yahweh*. Lorelei, that name was held in such sacred trust among the people of Israel that over the years, as a matter of reverence, it was not even spoken out loud.

Speaking of names, you have Grace as your middle name. I pray you'll live your life knowing that the grace of God is truly in your midst and that you will share God's grace with one and all as you follow Jesus.

**Ben:**

Ben, you and Gail Kennedy visited Ruth Woodward, Blanche Padgett, and Marian Congleton on Palm Sunday at Mayfair Village. You served them communion and Gail tells me you gave the prayer. She says, "The ladies really enjoyed having Ben."

For your service project, you and Gail built a large metal cart for Helping Hands, our monthly ministry to our neighbors in need. Great project!

Ben, in response to my question: *If a dove descended and a voice from heaven spoke at your baptism, what might the voice say to you?*, you answered, "God loves you." And in response to the question, *Why do you want to be baptized?*, you answered, "So I can feel the love."

God does love you, Ben, and I trust you will indeed feel that love throughout your life. May you in turn share that love with others.

Among the questions you asked, one was *What were the really bad things that happened in the Bible?* Good question. Here a few of the bad things:

- Humans sin over and over against God and each other causing all sorts of pain and heartache.
- The people of Israel repeatedly ignore God and chase after fake gods.
- David breaks nearly every one of the 10 Commandments in one fell swoop in one chapter (2 Samuel 11).

- Peter denies Jesus.
- Judas betrays Jesus.
- All the disciples forsake Jesus.
- Jesus is crucified.
- The Church repeatedly falls short of its calling, failing miserably to be Christ's people in this world. Paul scolds them and they still don't listen.

The Scriptures are filled with all those bad things and more, just as our world is today.

But Ben, I hope you will come to know that many really good things weave their way through Scripture, too. Chief among them:

- We have a God who so loves this world that God will never give up on us, turn his back on us, or leave us to our own miserable devices.
- "God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."
- "God so loved the world that God sent Jesus."
- "Jesus is with us always, even to the close of the age."
- "There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God."

Ben I pray that though there are bad things galore, you will have the faith of a disciple who is able to "hope all things, believe all things, bear all things and endure all things."

In a world of hurt and bad, may Ben be on the side of right and good.

### **Andrew:**

Andrew, you bear the name of one of the twelve apostles. In the early Church, Andrew was frequently referred to by the Greek name *Protokletos* which literally means "first-called." According to John's Gospel, Andrew holds the distinction of being the very first disciple called by Jesus.

On three different occasions, Andrew does the same thing: he introduces someone else to Jesus. His brother Peter. A young boy. Some Greeks. If a caption could be added to the portrait of Andrew in the gallery of Apostles, the phrase that captures his unique character and contribution to the spread of the Gospel would be "There's someone I'd like you to meet." He invited others to come to know Jesus. I hope you will grow up to have a faith that means so much to you that you'll want to invite others to know Jesus in the way you do, Andrew.

You went with elder Hank Sneed to visit Ann Burns and Ann Anderson. I know in talking with Ann Burns that she thoroughly enjoyed your visit.

One of your three questions was, *Why do we pray?*, to which I would answer that we pray for the same reason we talk. We talk in order to communicate with another person. To get to know them. To befriend them. To learn about them.

To tell them about ourselves-- our hopes, our hurts, and our dreams. In prayer, we communicate with God. Talk and listen to God. Befriend God. Learn about God. Tell God about ourselves. For all those reasons, I hope you will want to learn how to pray and you'll make prayer-- talking with God-- a part of your daily life.

Andrew, in response to the question, *Why did you decide to be part of the Pastor's Class this year?*, you answered, "Because I wondered what it felt like being up there being baptized. I thought it was cool watching my brothers being dunked in the water."

Well, you're gonna have a firsthand experience soon, Andrew!

May God bless and keep you always.

### **Benjamin:**

Benjamin, when asked, *If a dove descended and a voice from heaven spoke at your baptism, what might the voice say to you?*, you wrote, "Help people."

You helped the people at Best Friends Adult Day Care Center during your service project with Dave Nisbet and your dad. I understand you spent the better part of an afternoon with the men and women there serving them and talking with them. You honored God when you helped them.

In one of your questions, you asked, *Why is baptism being dunked under water?* The reason is the word baptism in the original Greek, *baptizo*, means "to dunk" or "to immerse." In baptism, we're immersed in water as if it's a great big bath tub so that we can be washed clean of our sins. Forgiven! And we're also dunked under water like we're being buried because we're promised that just as Jesus was buried and then raised up to new life by God on Easter, we, too will be raised up by God to new life and to eternal life.

You asked a couple good questions about the Bible. One of them was, *Were all of the people that wrote the stories of the Bible great or widely known?* Nope. We don't know who many of the writers of the Old Testament books were. Their identities are lost in the mists of time. But if God can inspire unknown people to write some of the most memorable pieces of writing of all time, who's to say how God might use plain old ordinary people like you and me, Benjamin?

You said you want to be baptized so you can be part of the church and be the only child in your family to be baptized. To which all I can say is, "You be first, Benjamin! Lead the way into the waters of the baptistery."

### **Roan:**

Roan, you stuffed 900 Easter bulletins with Bill Ogger and Pam Beck last weekend and most of them were taken last Sunday.

When asked, *Why did you decide to be part of the Pastor's Class this year?*, you said, "Because I want to become closer to God and I feel like this is the best way to accomplish this." You added, "I hope I will learn more about the importance of baptism and communion. I also hope to get to know elders and other people involved in the church." I hope these weeks have helped you accomplish those desires.

I really liked a couple of your questions, Roan. You asked, *Are there responsibilities after you are baptized? If there are, what are they?* Glad you asked.

The Apostle Paul said after we're baptized our responsibility is to "walk in newness of life." That means baptism is just the beginning of our journey of faith. Don't think once you're baptized that you've made it and it's all over. At baptism, what you've made it to is the starting line of your Christian life! Rather than it being all over, your journey of faith has just begun.

Your responsibility is to "walk in newness of life." Meaning what? Well, Paul put it this way: "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And... put on love, which binds everything together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."

You also asked, *What does it mean to be part of the church?* Paul spoke of the church as the body of Christ in which each of us are members. Each member, he says, has a unique and irreplaceable contribution to make to the body. Just as the body needs members like hearts and hands and lungs and brains and kidneys and gall bladders to be healthy and alive, so does the church as the body of Christ need members like Roan and Thomas and Celia and Lorelei and Andrew, Benjamin, and Benjamin to be healthy and alive. May you find your place as a member of the church and give your all to it.

When I asked, *If a dove descended and a voice from heaven spoke at your baptism, what might the voice say to you?*, you wrote, "This is Roan whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Well stated, Roan!

Peace of God be with you

**Thomas:**

Thomas, when asked, *Why did you decide to be part of the Pastor's Class this year?*, you said, "I have wanted to be baptized for a long time and I think the

Pastor's Class can help me. I want to learn why baptism is important and what it means."

Well, your long wait is almost over. I hope you've learned through these weeks why baptism is important and what it means.

Among your questions, you asked, *Do people still get miraculously healed today like they did in the Bible? If not, why not?* I believe people are healed in any number of ways, including through the knowledge, training, and skills of medical professionals like doctors, nurses, and psychiatrists, and through psychologists, therapists and sometimes even through preachers and pastoral counselors. And I also believe people are healed miraculously-- in ways inexplicable to the medical profession. Bottom line: No matter how it happens, I believe God is on the side of bringing healing and overcoming suffering and I hope and pray you will be a channel of God's healing graces using the gifts and graces God has given you, Thomas.

You asked, *What happens to people who die without being baptized?* To be honest, I don't know. There are folks, of course, who say that people who aren't baptized or aren't baptized in a certain way or haven't made their confession of faith in the right way or haven't lived the right way or believed the right way or who-knows-what-all-else are going to be in a bad way (and a bad place) when they die. But they don't *know* that and neither do I.

My concern is what happens to people who *live* without being baptized. I ache for people who live their lives without the strength that comes from leaning on the everlasting arms of God or without the wisdom that comes from living life learning from Jesus or without the joy that come from being able to glimpse the presence of the risen Lord every single day doing things good and right and beautiful and just. My heart aches for people who live without the fullness of life that I've come to know as a result of being baptized. For me, life as a baptized believer has been so inexpressibly good that whatever happens after death will just be icing on the cake. I rejoice, Thomas, that you are going to find out what happens to people who *live* with being baptized. As for everyone else, love them and leave them to our Loving God.

You also asked, *Why does God allow suffering?* and *Why can I sometimes hear the Holy Spirit and sometimes I can't?* Thomas, I ask those questions, too. Call me when you know the answers.

Lastly, you wrote, "...I know that God can guide me through anything and I hope that my decision to be baptized will make God proud. I want to understand more about worship and why we do it. Most of all, I want to make worship a bigger part of my life."

All I can add to that is AMEN.