



“No Ordinary Sunday: Voices from Heaven”

Baptism of Our Lord
5:30 p.m. Saturday, January 9, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Isaiah 43:1-7](#); [Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

A couple of nights ago, I was sitting in one of the many and various meetings that are part of my life here at Trinity. That particular meeting was for the Membership Task Force. That group is working on trying to figure out how we can keep better track of folks here at Trinity, and how they become involved in the life of the congregation. That led to a conversation of how someone becomes a member here at Trinity, which prompted another member of the group to ask about baptism. Specifically, the question was, will the pastors here at Trinity baptize someone who is not a member?

Looking back on that conversation, I realized I answered that question a little bit incorrectly, because by being baptized, an individual becomes a member of the congregation. But I answered the question from the premise of, if parents who are not members want their child baptized, would I do that? And, as in nearly all things, since I cannot give a short answer, I answered her like this: I have, on occasion, had people who are not members of the congregation I am serving, ask me to preside at the baptism of their child.

The first question I generally ask is, why would they want a congregation where they are not members, to baptize their child? Here at Trinity, it's usually because they have some affiliation with Trinity: they grew up here, but now live somewhere else; or their parents (that is, the grandparents of the child) are members here, and it's easier to have a baptism here than for them to go elsewhere; something along those lines.

But I have also had people who are not affiliated with whatever congregation I am serving ask for their child to be baptized. When that has happened, I have spoken with the families, and asked them why they desired to have a child baptized if they were not involved with a congregation. I explain to them that in baptism they are making promises. But they are not making promises to John Brock; rather, they are making promises in public, to their child, in front of God. Then, we go over what those promises mean.

Now, I can almost hear you all thinking: “What were those promises?” Let's do a quick reminder course.

As a family, or an individual, gathers around the font, this is what we say (and I am going to say all this from the point of view of adults bringing a child to be baptized, rather than from an adult who has asked to be baptized). I say to the adults:

As you bring *your child* to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities: to live with *them* among God's faithful people, bring *them* to the word of God and the holy supper, teach *them* the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, place in *their* hands the holy scriptures, and nurture *them* in faith and prayer so that *your children* may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace. Do you promise to help *your child* grow in the Christian faith and life? (ELW 228)

What does any of that mean? Let's take it one at a time.

to live with *them* among God's faithful people You are going to raise this child around other believers. Not that they cannot be exposed to other faiths. Simply that the primary people in their lives will be believers in Christ Jesus. So they can see faith being lived out.

bring *them* to the word of God and the holy supper That means you will bring them to worship on a regular - and frequent - basis. Every Christmas Eve and Easter is regular. We mean more frequently than that.

teach *them* the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments This one is probably rather straight forward - help your child to know and learn and take those teachings to heart.

place in *their* hands the holy scriptures This one, Trinity helps with a couple of different times. The first time, every year the most recent class of Third graders receive a Bible. This happens again when a student begins Affirmation of Baptism in Eighth grade.

and nurture *them* in faith and prayer Okay, this is one where Christians in the Lutheran tradition tend to slip up on. We can pretty much teach children easy prayers: *Our Father, who art in heaven*, or some table grace. In the Brock household, it was *Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, let this food to us be blessed. Amen.* But we Lutherans tend to get a little shy when we go beyond already written, already prescribed, prayers. And so this is one of those promises that we *all* could stand to work on.

so that *your children* may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace. All of that is a long way of saying, "so that this child learns how live out their Christian faith."

Then, when these children, on whose behalf you made these promises, enter Eighth grade, here at Trinity, they go through Affirmation of Baptism. It's during that year that we as pastors do our best to make certain the youth understand those promises, AND are willing to now take those promises on for themselves. That they are willing to take responsibility for their own actions. In order that, eventually, everyone will take on the promises made at their baptism in their own life.

So those are the promises, which is what we say, to our child, in front of witnesses, before God. We either promised to teach our own children, or a child we love as

Godparents. Maybe we made those promises for ourselves, because we were baptized as an adult. If so, you made similar promises.

The question that arises, however, is: *How do we LIVE OUT those promises that we have made to God?* See, that's the kicker here. It's one thing to say something, to promise something, even when we have the best of intentions to carry out those promises. It's a different thing entirely to actually carry those promises into our everyday lives.

Let me give you a very recent example: As you might be aware, there are people who come to churches looking for financial assistance. We (the pastors) have a couple of different ways of approaching this help. Most of Trinity's financial aid for people looking for temporary assistance is funneled through New Hope Ministry. This is a great, interdenominational organization, based out of Dillsburg, but with a building in Mechanicsburg that acts as office, classrooms, screening center, and food warehouse. New Hope has the means and process to check out people's stories.

We do, however, have some funds on hand in the office, in the form of gift cards to Giant. People have to show us a photo ID, which we make a copy of, and then they can receive a \$10 gift card. That's for non-members, somebody coming in off the street. We do have a lot of repeat folks. And we have had plenty of individuals who have made full use of our system.

For members, though, we do things differently. We have the Benevolence Emergency Fund. We use this fund, among other things, to purchase those gift cards. We also use this fund to help, primarily our members, who might be in need. Case in point: this weekend we are housing one of our members who is facing some difficulty. That in and of itself is not a problem. The difficulty is that we have helped this member in this fashion before. A couple of times before. And this member continues to make poor decisions that puts this member back into difficult situations. (And let me quickly say, this person's life is not in danger, nor is this individual abusing any substances.)

What we as pastors struggle with, is how often, and to what extent, do we continue to help this member? This weekend, as we talk about those promises made in baptism, I have been struggling with what does our baptism say we are called to do in this kind of a situation? How does baptism help me make difficult decisions? You see, to me, it is situations like this which bring me directly back to the one of those first things in the list of promises made at baptism, which is in baptism we are called to

live . . . among God's faithful people.

I can't do that on my own. I have a difficult time, living out my faith, if I try to do it all by myself. Yet, when I am in worship; when I gather with other believers; when I go to Camp Nawakwa and see faith in action through the counselors and staff, and the campers, then I have an easier time to talk with God. More importantly, in those situations I find myself better able to **listen** when God speaks to me. I know that even doing those things - being in worship, being around other believers - I still don't always make the right decisions. I'll still get upset and grumpy with this particular member.

But, maybe, perhaps, because I'm here with you, I'll be able to help this member in

other ways. Maybe, because I'm spending time with other believers, I'll realize that it's best for me and my own health to simply walk away. I don't know. But I **do** believe that will be because of **our** faith, that because of what **we** do as we gather together for worship and fellowship, that I will better be able to come to an understanding. Because we, as the Body of Christ, are striving, together, to live out the promises of our baptism. And it is **together** that any of us can walk in faith.

Now, listening to our gospel lesson tonight, I think it would be **fantastic** if God would speak to us like when Jesus was baptized. If this voice, calling down from heaven: "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Wouldn't life be so much easier if God called down to us "John: This is what I want you to do." God doesn't work that way. God does talk to us, though. We **do** hear those voices from heaven, when we gather together in Christ's name; when we worship; when we sit and study scripture, either on our own or with other believers. Those are the times that help us remember the promises that were made on our behalf, and those promises that we have claimed as our own. Those are the times that we are better able to walk this faith, and to remember that God is with us, in all things.

Let us live, knowing that truth.

Amen.

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