

The Reverend Shelley Ryan
St. Luke's Episcopal Church ~ Anchorage, Kentucky
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13) Year C July 30 & 31, 2016
Colossians 3:1-11

Stop the world – I want to get off! Ever feel this way? This is nominated musical set against the backdrop of a circus. The emphasis of the show focuses upon the birth to death journey of a clown named Littlechap. Littlechap deemed himself to be more astute than the other clowns, and he had a burning desire to become wealthy & successful, and to experience the world. In order to accomplish his goals however, the commitment to his wife whom he loved, and their two daughters would take a back seat to his worldly desire for adventure and success. Eventually, Littlechap would attain the success that he so desired, but not without the cost of temptation and inappropriate liaisons along the way. And, in addition to this, during his journey, when things didn't go the way he thought they should, or when things occurred in his life that he deemed to be unacceptable or a nuisance, Littlechap would cry out 'Stop the world I want to get off!'

Have any of us ever had thoughts like this? We tend to have ideas or plans that things ought to be a certain way do we not?, and when they don't go the way that we think they ought to we often find ourselves becoming frustrated, or perhaps even angry, often feeling, more often than not, that our lives are out of our control.

This musical represents a journey that is filled with challenges, joy, temptation, and ultimately redemption. Throughout Littlechap's journey; he eventually learns what is most important in life, but, sadly it was not until his old age that he realizes that the love of his wife, and his family had been the key all along for fulfillment and peace.

I liken this story, metaphorically, to our journey through life. As we too have goals, dreams, and aspirations, which are all wonderful things, but in the midst of it all we sometimes lose sight of what is most important. We may unknowingly overlook, or forget our most inherent value, which is the unequivocal assuredness of our true sense of worth because of who we are in Christ.

Paul's letter to the Colossians invokes two prominent images that remind us of the profound meaning of our identity in Christ through the initiatory rite of baptism. In the midst of the chaos in our world, I believe this bears repeating because we receive the gift of hope and not despair when we grasp the immense magnitude of this holy sacrament.

First, baptism is a dying and rising in Christ, death to an old way of life, and resurrection to a new way of life. In addition, our baptism breaks the universal power of sin by incorporating us into the church. (*Feasting on the Word: J. Shelley*). According to the great second century Christian philosopher and apologist, Justin Martyr, "Christian baptism is a birth ritual modeled on Jesus' own baptism in the Jordan, where Christians become by adoption what Christ is by nature, sons and daughters begotten by God through water and the Holy Spirit." (*The Rites of Initiation: Maxwell E. Johnson*).

Baptized Christians are expected to live by new standards, because for Christians' who have been baptized into the body of Christ, who is truth, (as recorded in John 1:17) then truth telling ought to be our way of life - which empowers us to see reality for what it truly is. This new and necessary reality, though daunting and challenging, is embraced by the church, and therefore has the capacity to break down a myriad of barriers that divide people.

As I have stated before, we are in the world, but we are not of the world. I have heard it said that we are spiritual beings having a human experience, rather than human beings having a spiritual experience. When you take time to ponder this statement, in the light of the baptismal rite and the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, I believe there is truth in it. Some may deem this to be too far-fetched, or too supernatural, but when we are able to comprehend the inexorable magnitude of being baptized into Christ, “dying and rising with Christ”, I would conjecture to say that this is a statement carries some merit.

Paul’s letter reminds us that we are to “set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” Professor of liturgy and Lutheran minister Maxwell E. Johnson puts it eloquently as he states “The spiritual journey in Christ is a journey of both place and displacement, a journey of death and resurrection, of birthing pangs and the bringing forth of new life, and the paradigm for all this is most certainly baptism. Baptism places into the world a community of displaced people on a pilgrimage who really walk nowhere except where they are led, a people sure of their identity of the body of Christ, as those who always walk wet in the baptismal waters of their origin.” The apostle Paul delivered a radical message that still today may be too radical for many Christians. The central Pauline metaphor for baptism is “the great equalizer,” Baptism actually transcends barriers and labels that have been created by man. The role of baptism is one with our spiritual journey, and the agenda calls us back to the font, where time and time again we are to be reminded of the true, universal, and Catholic universal image of Christ in the world.

Remember who you are, remember where you came from, and like Littlechap – go into the world, cultivate your dreams and ambitions, but take heart to never lose sight of your inherent value that is derived through baptism we are “hidden with Christ in God.” Amen.