

Sermon on Baptism— St. Andrew's
January 9,2010

Baptisms are truly Epiphanies of God's love in our Lord's baptism and ours. This action, more than any other, unites us to God and all of creation. There are two figures in our history that I hope Cage will remember. Their birthdays next month are those of Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin. From humble beginnings, Lincoln's life of service led to the emancipation of slaves and the healing of a nation. From much less humble beginnings, Darwin's discoveries have enabled us to see the beauty of an evolving creation. Both struggled with their calls to ministry, one became a servant of the nation and the other of the mystery of creation.

When we are baptized we are enrolled in and empowered for ministry. Ministry literally means service: service to the *magister*, or service to God. At baptism we become part of Christ's body, infused with Christ's character, and empowered to be Christ's presence in the world. Ministry is not something we just do at church or from our church; it is what we are about in everything we do as children and adults.

Caroline Westerhoff poses these questions which we might ask of ourselves as parents, sponsors, and the baptized. What if we took seriously that every Christian carries the mind and heart of Christ? What if we were to see that our lifelong work is to practice holy habits that reveal and name the Christ in ourselves and others? We then would envision ministries that include every man, woman, and child we graft into the body of Christ regardless of gift or grace or circumstance.

We would identify and honor the ministries of children and the aged. We would identify and honor the ministry of student as well as of the teacher. We would name and respect the ministry of the sick and the dying as well as those who bring healing and comfort to them, the ministry of the homeless as well as those who strive to bring some measure of dignity and relief.

We would accept and welcome the ministry of the loyal dissidents as well as those who seek to address their concerns, and respect the ministry of those who want to change the way live and the way we see God as did Lincoln and Darwin.

Caroline reminds us of the virtues or dispositions characteristic of the baptized:

The first is the disposition of presence—approaching the world and all of its creatures, not just humans, as subjects to be cherished and worthy of care and respect. A sign of presence is being able to look each other in the eye and honor one another with attention.

The second disposition is that of being vulnerable—a word that comes from the Latin, to wound. It is a willingness to be wounded for the sake of the other and in service to the other. We see a vulnerable disposition naturally in children.

Another is the disposition to be hospitable. Hospitality comes from the word the same root as “hostile.” Thus hospitality entails welcoming the enemy as guest. The enemy for us is all that is strange and different and frightening. These enemies include ideas, people, change, endings and beginnings—“even the pursuing and beckoning God with whom we continually wrestle and contend. At baptism we receive a new name – Christian—and we are to spend the rest of our lives welcoming its implications.

We are also to embrace the disposition of order. Some of us are even designated orderers—called the ordained. Sometimes our notions of order take the place of perhaps a more faithful understanding. Jesus brought order by turning the expected upside down, inside out. His order is the order of paradox: to be the greatest is to be the least, the servant of all. Rules are to be broken sometimes in order that God’s law of love can be declared.

Another disposition is that of humility. It may help us to remember that God uses the ridiculous to convert the deadly serious. We are to come to the table this morning as

children, as Cage does, dropping our layers of pretense. If a child asked you these questions, what would you say? Does God laugh with us? Does God shed tears and cry? Sometimes it is hard to know what to say when we are trying so hard to keep control. In the absence of humility, we forget to humbly ask God to remove all of our defects of character.

Finally, we are to be disposed to simplify. This is the hardest for me as we prepare each time Thayer and I prepare to move. Jesus sent out the disciples two by two, charging them to wear sandals and one tunic and to carry a staff. They were to take nothing else for the journey, neither bread nor bag nor money in their belts. Do we really need all of our stuff...old stuff, new stuff, books I may never read or read again....sentimental stuff, the stuff of memories of family and friends. Even young children in our culture have too much stuff! God help us to simplify!

Our list dispositions can go on. Let us remember that these dispositions, a big word for Cage, contain the divine image, the mind and heart of Christ. All must be held in tension with each other for the whole to be complete. The disposition that binds all together is love, that same binding love that calls us into community with the newly baptized and his family this morning. Welcome Cage as a vital part of this family. This is the binding love of the hospitality of Christ that makes us all one. Welcome him and invite all to bless this community with our dispositions of presence, vulnerability, hospitality, order, humility, and simplicity enriching the body of Christ in the whole world.