

A Relational View of the Baptismal Covenant—By Buddy Coffey

(Part One)

ABSTRACT

God is calling everyone, everywhere, at every time, and in every way. The calls are all calls to relationship, and it is always God who takes the initiative to call us. As we answer those calls, we are drawn into closer relationship with him, with each other, with ourselves, and with society. The Baptismal Covenant provides a framework through which we can hear the calls, relate to the calls, and respond to the calls.

This article begins a three-part series that examines our Baptismal Covenant from a relational point of view.

INTRODUCTION

For Episcopalians the Baptismal Covenant is the “Gold Standard” for Christian living. In it we find instruction – in summary form – on how to be “fully alive” per second century Bishop Irenaeus. Our “aliveness” is expressed inwardly (perseverance, repentance), outwardly (fellowship, evangelism, service) and upwardly (“I believe...”).

We also believe that God is relational. Since we are created in his image, we are relational, too. As soon as we declare that “God is love” (1 John 4:16) we are led to a Trinitarian view of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it is to this close, intimate relationship of the Trinity that we are to aspire. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus yearns for all of us to experience the same oneness that he experiences with the Father. (John 17:21).

Finally, we know that God calls not just a select few but everyone, everywhere, every time, and in every circumstance. We read of individual calls throughout scripture, but we also see verses to make our “calling and election sure.” (2 Pet. 1:10).

This article approaches the Baptismal Covenant from the point of view of God calling each of us into deeper relationship with him, with each other, with ourselves, and with those around us. The calls seem to be progressive though they may not be strictly sequential. An earlier call can be the foundational bedrock of a later one.

As we answer these calls, we open up our hearts further, remove the “masks” that obscure who we really are, and draw closer to God and one another.

SALVATION: CALL TO RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

“I believe . . .”

The first call any of us hears is a call to relationship with God. It’s not so much that we desire a relationship with him as He desires a relationship with us. As with all the callings, God takes the initiative here, too, whether through a burning bush (Ex. 3), the grandeur of creation (Ps. 19), the invitation of a friend (John 4:29), the passion of a sermon (Acts 2:14), or the suffering love of a Savior.

Our Baptismal Covenant begins with the Apostles’ Creed, placed in a setting so that it can be read responsively. Each of the major sentences begins with “I believe in ... God... Jesus Christ... the Holy Spirit.” We see immediately that our relationship with God is one with the potential of intimate friendship. God is presented in a personal way with qualities highlighted in the different aspects of the Trinity: Father (solidity, stability, creator), Son (dynamic, personal, human), and Holy Spirit (radiant, luminous).

Sometimes we see the Apostles’ Creed as only a set of theological propositions to be affirmed and forget the call to relationship behind it. Does salvation require believing certain things in certain ways, or does salvation mean drawing into a deep relationship with God?

The Apostles’ Creed takes up fully half of the Baptismal Covenant, and through this emphasis we see the foundational importance of our call to intimate relationship with God. Here we see the progressive nature of our calling, for without our having answered God’s call to salvation, none of the other calls make sense.

FELLOWSHIP: CALL TO RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER

“Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

We can read the above as good things to do – and they are! But in context, this phrase takes on a deeper relational meaning.

This affirmation is found in Acts 2:42. The whole thought continues to the end of the

chapter. The day of Pentecost has come. The Holy Spirit is made known to the 120 gathered in the upper room, and spectacularly so! Peter goes into the crowds and preaches an amazing sermon that all can hear in their native languages. So many heard God’s call to salvation that they were baptized, and “three thousand (!) were added to their number (120) that day.” (Acts 2:41).

What would you do if 3,000 new people walked through the door of your church next Sunday? Acts 2:42-47 describes what the early New Testament church did. They were brought into a New Community the likes of which they had never experienced. They met daily as they could, they supplied each other’s needs, shared meals, and they opened their hearts to each other. During this, “everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were done.” (Acts 2:43)

After our call to salvation, God calls us into the relationship of community, which we call fellowship. Sometimes we think of fellowship as having a few quick words over coffee after church, or perhaps working on some worthwhile project together, or worshipping together on Sunday morning. Again, all of these are fine and wonderful things, but they do not begin to express the close, sharing community that God next calls us to.

As we learn to draw into deeper intimacy with God, we begin to learn to open our hearts toward him. This next call teaches us to open our hearts to one another as we have learned to open our hearts to God. The discouragement, frustration, and emotional turmoil we experience from time to time may not be solved by attending a class or going on a retreat or reading a book or even getting pastoral care. Sometimes what is needed is an open heart gently offered to the one in need. Many times what we hunger for is not a lecture but an “ear,” not a book but a “shoulder,” and not pastoral care but companion care.

Our second call is a call to community, not to just “do” church or attend church but to “be” the church to each other. To have a safe, secure setting where we can love and be loved, serve and be served, celebrate and be celebrated, encourage and be encouraged, and “see” and be “seen.”

(to be continued next month)

Volunteering at Grace Place

For those of you who have ever wondered what is involved in volunteering for Grace Place, I would like to share the following information. First off, Grace Place provides lunch every Tuesday at 11:30 AM here at St. John’s. Each week the meal is provided by members from various local churches. The team from St. John’s has their turn on the third Tuesday every month. Our St. John’s team partners with volunteers from St. Patrick’s and together we prepare meals for approximately 100 people. One month St. John’s is responsible for the meal, and St. Patrick’s will be responsible for deserts, drinks and serving the meals to our guests. Then the next month we rotate our duties.

So, how can you help? We can always use extra hands in the kitchen and we can always use donations of cakes and pies. Here are the dates that we will be responsible for desserts: May 17, July 19, September 20 and November 15. The dates for the meal preparation are: June 21, August 16, October 18 and December 20.

If you need more information, or wish to volunteer, please call 410-939-3324. Nadine Anderson

The Eagle

The Newsletter of St. John’s Episcopal Church

May 2011



Unity in the Community

A Multi-Cultural Event Aberdeen Festival Park 12pm

We will be hosting a **Bake Table** for this event. We are reaching out to our community, getting involved, and finding new people to join us!!

Sandra Pope has been kind enough to help run the table. She needs volunteers to help her that day. Let Sandra, Kallie, or Keith know if you can donate something to the Bake Table. If you cannot take a bake donation to the event yourself, please contact the office or Kallie so that we can arrange to get your donation there on time.

Evie has donated her truck to the cause of moving the tables over, but we still need help, so call Kallie if you are willing to help load or unload the truck.

Sandra @ 410-939-2827,

Keith @ 410-939-1020

Kallie @ 410-939-1203

A Prayer for the Day

Lord, give me the patience to see this day through,

In Joy and in sorrow to seek you

Teach me to trust in your loving Son,

From the time this day starts until the moment it’s done.

Teach me not to murmur, complain or to strive,

Because only through you am I truly alive.

Sometimes it’s not until I wander or stray,

That I realize it’s near you I always must stay.

So teach me to love you and always be true,

From the time this day starts till the moment it’s though.

-from Akron, OK

Gloria Lemm

May Calendar
Happy Birthday:

3 Elra Carter
8 Lori Gengenbach
11 Priscilla Blakeslee
11 Jenny White
12 Mindy Elledge
14 Rebecca Hewitt
28 Mary Ann Weber
28 Betty Neff
29 Stephanie Lyon

Happy Anniversary:

9 Matthew and Shannon Taylor
26 Dottie and Wayne Erickson

Congratulations to Billy and Vicki
Brandon who got married last
month.

If you've got an anniversary or a
birthday coming up, let us
know!!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR

Sunday, July 3rd, is the day of the
Independence Celebration Parade.
You will not be able to park on Con-
gress, Stokes, Otsego, Bourbon, Pen-
nington, or Juniata from 11am to
4pm.

Unity in the Community
Cultural Event
12pm Aberdeen Festival Park
Downtown Aberdeen

May 25th: Deadline for Eagle
entries:

stjohnshdg@verizon.net

Readers Schedule May—June:

5/1: Jackie Brandon

5/8: Keith Butler

5/15: Jan Biondo

5/22: Mary White

5/29 Carlos Morales

6/5 Jan Biondo

6/12 Keith Butler

6/19 Jackie Brandon

6/26 Mary White

The readings will be available at
the back of the church.

Have you ever felt God Lay
his hands on you?

Twice God has saved me from
death or serious injury. This past
week I was Spring cleaning. I
was hanging up my heavy wet
curtains in the bedroom. The first
curtain to go up was above my
bed, I had no problem. The other
curtain was above my computer
desk. I stepped up onto my chair
to step onto my computer desk,
with curtain in hand. Suddenly
the chair tilted backwards, with
one foot on the chair the other on
the desk. My heart was pounding
so hard I thought it was going to
come out of my body when I felt
pressure on my back. Slowly the
chair tilted forward but I was still
off balance. The pressure on my
back became stronger until I
could step one leg off the desk
onto the chair. There is no doubt
in my mind it was the hand of God
who held me for several
minutes. He saved me from hit-
ting my head on the foot board of
my bed which would have killed
me or certainly paralyzed

me. This was the second time I
have felt his hands upon me. I
have always known God has
been with me since I was a small
child. Many times I have felt him
right beside me in my times of
serious trouble. (which I had
many times of serious trouble as
a teenager). I am interested in
hearing other people's stories of
God touching them. It would be
wonderful to share your stories in
the Eagle. You do not have to
have your name printed.

God Bless, Mary White
Vestry Member Letter

Fr. Bill's one year service as our
Priest is fast upon us. He has
become a friend as well as our
Priest. I think he is doing a won-
derful job. As with some people I
was not sure about him at the
beginning because I was compar-
ing him to our Beloved Fr.
John. As time passed I remem-
bered something Fr. John had
said not long after his arrival to St.
John's, I am not your last Priest,
Fr. Rory and I will be doing things
differently. Once I remember that
I became more open to Fr. Bill. I
have to give praise to Fr. Bill for
the things he has started; there
are two new services, he makes
all new comers feel welcome, he
goes out into the community to
seek new comers, and works to
bring back people who have left
our Church. As a vestry member I
am very impressed with the direc-
tion he is leading Vestry mem-
bers. I remember a time when

Vestry meetings became shouting
matches, people talking and raising
their voices over the person trying to
speak. We are acting as a Vestry
should act thanks to the things he
has done to make sure each person
has their time to speak. We, as a
Vestry, are working hard to figure
out what it is St. John's needs to
bring in more people, fund raising
and many other positive ide-
as. Please remember Vestry is
open to any person and we would
welcome any ideas for fund raising
etc. One thing we have decided is if
you have a question concerning
anything about our Church or ideas
or concerns about some of the
things Fr. Bill does, you can come to
any Vestry member. If we do not
have an answer for you at that mo-
ment, we will find out for you. I have
requested a list of Vestry members
be posted in the back of the Church
so you know who is serving your
Church as a member of the Vestry.
So please feel free to ask, ask, ask!
We are hoping this will

stop people from talking to one an-
other about concerns leaving the
Vestry and Fr. Bill out of the loop of
your concerns. Please take ad-
vantage of this.

We had a wonderful Holy Week. For
those who missed the services
throughout the week, you missed a
great week of services. Some
things were done differently than I
was used to but they were nice
changes and I really could feel the
Holy Spirit with us each night. I was
not able to attend Saturday night

service in North East, but heard it
was wonderful. I am looking for-
ward to next year.

I am sure all of you have noticed
how beautiful the grounds are be-
coming. I would like to thank our Jr.
Warden Greg for all of his work. We
still have work to do outside and
inside of the Church and Parish
Hall. We may be small in numbers
but the past shows our members
have huge and loving hearts for St.
John's, so when we are called to
help with cleaning inside or work
outside I know we will put on our
working clothes and get to work. I
want to thank you in advance for
helping out around our beautiful
Church.

May God's Love and Grace fill our
hearts each and every day, Mary
White

Treasurers Article

Rather than the usual "we're in the
red – we spent this much" Eagle
articles, I've opted to do something
different from time to time. I often
feel like a broken record repeating
the same sort of info and felt that I
could add more to the Eagle in this
manner. If any of you want a de-
tailed update, please feel free to call
me at 410-939-1203 or email me at
kallie67@comcast.net and I will go
over the financials with you. As
always, you are welcome to attend
the vestry meeting at 7 p.m. on the
3rd Tuesday of each month as well.

In the meantime, I'd like to share
this with you. It's one of my favorite
Native American tales.

An old Cherokee is teaching his
grandson about life.

"A fight is going on inside me," he
said to the boy.

"It is a terrible fight and it is between
two wolves. One is evil - he is an-
ger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed,
arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resent-
ment, inferiority, lies, false pride,
superiority, and ego."

He continued, "The other is good -
he is joy, peace, love, hope, sereni-
ty, humility, kindness, benevolence,
empathy, generosity, truth, compas-
sion, and faith. The same fight is
going on inside you - and inside
every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a
minute and then asked his grandfa-
ther, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied,
"The one you feed."

I'd heard this many times before, but
it was recently handed out during a
leadership conference at work. It
was read out loud in order to begin
a dialogue about taking sides, gos-
sip, breaking confidentiality, etc.
vs. positive reinforcement, team-
work, and praise and the like. If you
feed the negative, it reinforces the
negative and the same with the pos-
itive. This also goes for worry as
well. If you put a negative spin on
everything, then it self-perpetuates
and a downward spiral begins.

I, for one, plan on feeding the good
wolf!

Blessings and peace- Kallie Lyons

Holy Week and Easter Services

Maundy Thursday

We celebrated the Last Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ with his disciples. Remembering how the Lord humbled Himself by washing the feet of his apostles, we washed each other's feet as the choir sang an anthem based on Ubi Caritas (Where Charity and Love are). The invitation to participate was extended to those who felt comfortable doing so but almost everyone present took part. When the hymns, readings, prayers and Eucharist were over Fr. Bill and the Altar Guild cleared the altar while everyone else read Psalm 22. The light over the altar was extinguished and the Reserved Sacrament was placed on a simple side altar for use on Good Friday. After this, the congregation departed in silence.

Washing the feet of a fellow parishioner is a symbolic way of reminding ourselves that we are called to love and serve each other; to humble ourselves and realize that we are no more important than any other human being. It is a moving service which sets the

tone for the events of Good Friday.

Good Friday

At noon a large group of parishioners from various churches in Havre de Grace met at David S. Craig Park to begin the Way of the Cross. This event is organized by the Susquehanna Ministerium and has been going for at least 20 years. Groups of people take turns carrying the large, heavy wooden cross through the city with stops at strategic places for a reading, a prayer and a hymn. Carrying that burdensome cross is a chance to experience just some of what Christ suffered for us. This is a time to come together with other local Christians and remember in a powerful way the sacrifice that Jesus made for each one of us.

The church service at 7:00pm was a very solemn occasion. The Passion of our Lord from Palm Sunday was read. Fr. Bill did a short sermon and we received Holy Communion from the Reserved Sacrament. The choir sang three short pieces of sacred music while members of the congregation walked up

to kneel and pray before the cross during the Veneration of the Cross. A truly touching service.

The Great Vigil of Easter

Fr. Bill and members of our parish joined with the rector and parishioners of St. Mark's, Perryville, and travelled to St. Mary Anne's in North East. We stood in the cemetery surrounding the lovely little church on the banks of the North East Creek at sunset and began with the story of Creation from Genesis. There were people fishing from a boat and ducks and geese along the water. When the lector reached the part where "God created birds to fly over the earth" two ducks flew over us, right on cue! Not to be outdone, the geese made noises in all the right places! There were tall reeds in sight as we read from Exodus about how Moses parted the Red Sea (or Sea of Reeds). Fr. Bill & I read about the Valley of the Dry Bones from Ezekiel as we stood among the graves. There was a pause after the part where "there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone."

and parishioners used rain makers to simulate the sounds. The final reading was the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being thrown into the fiery furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar. At several places a reference is made to "the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music" and at these points all kinds of musical instruments were played at once. At the place where the king sees four people in the fire walking around unharmed (the fourth person is an angel), four geese ran noisily away from our group!

By now we had reached the church door and the new fire was lit and blessed and used to light the Paschal Candle, from which our hand-held candles were lit. We entered the bright church and sang glorious Easter hymns to proclaim that Jesus had Risen! We rang bells during the Gloria (and some of us during the Alleluias!) and received the first Eucharist of Easter. The final hymn was "I am the Bread of Life" ending with the refrain: "And I will raise you up ..." and it truly was a very uplifting way to welcome the Light back into the world.

Easter Day - the Day of the Resurrection

We were blessed with lovely weather for our Easter Day services and also with more people in attendance than usual. Bells were handed out to parishioners as they arrived so they could ring in the Alleluias as we sang the Easter hymns. It's always wonderful to sing the Gloria and Alleluias again after six weeks of Lenten hymns! The altar and church looked lovely courtesy of Sandra Pope, who had picked up the Easter lilies, and Jackie Brandon and Joanne Calder, who had arranged the flowers so beautifully with help from Keith Butler.

They also carried the font to the front of the church so that people could cross themselves with the blessed water on their way to receive Holy Communion.

After the wonderful service there was an Easter cake and other goodies in the parish hall for all to celebrate the Risen Lord and the Easter season.

Volunteers Needed

The Vestry Room and the Sunday School Rooms need to be cleared out. If you can volunteer

for an hour or two for this project, please let Sarah know. Please let Greg Shinn know if you can help with any of the Grounds restoration.

If you have the gift of writing, please send in an article for the Eagle!

If you can help serve or cook once a month or once a quarter at Grace Place, please let Nadine Anderson know.

Fall Festival: If you have any event planning or hosting skills, please contact Anne Shinn or Kallie Lyons.

Unity in the Community Event:

Calling all Bakers--we need your help to have a successful bake sale on May 7th! Please call Kallie or Sandra to arrange for the pick up of your baked goodies.

Evie Brendle has graciously offered to drive her truck to the May 7th event in Aberdeen. We will be able to move the tables and everything we need to set up for the Bake Sale very easily now. Thanks Evie!

If you can help, contact Sandra @ 410-939-2827, or Keith @ 410-939-1020

If you know of any other volunteers needed in the church, please let me know.

St. John's Eagle

The Monthly Newsletter of

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

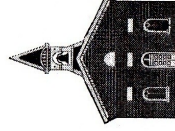
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