

I don't often spend time thinking about our baptismal vows. But this week I found myself explaining to a friend, "My baptismal vow is to seek and serve Christ in all persons and that includes the president." She was amazed that I could consider the president to be my neighbor.

Our baptismal vows are not easy nor are they simple. We say them quite fast and rarely spend much time focusing on them. But if we were to live by them, what a difference that would make in our world.

Today is the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in a new and rather dramatic way. There were many people gathered in Jerusalem that day for the festival of *Shavuot*. This festival was originally a festival for the wheat harvest which later was associated with the giving of the Torah. Its date was found by counting 49 days – that's seven times seven - from Passover. *Shavuot* would be the next day. The Greek word Pentecost comes from it being the 50th day.

In the Old Testament we read of the tradition of Jubilee. Every 50th year was to be a year of Jubilee when all debts were written off and land or other property that had been taken in payment of a debt was returned. In the Greek translation Jubilee becomes "A trumpet-blast of liberty". We might consider Pentecost, the 50th day after Easter, to be a trumpet-blast of liberty. Suddenly, the disciples are empowered to talk about God in a way that hasn't been heard before. The people around them are amazed as they hear them speaking in their own dialects.

I want to suggest to you this morning that our own baptismal vows are a "trumpet-blast of liberty."

First, we renounce evil and the spiritual powers which corrupt this world as well as all the things that pull us away from living in the reality of God's love. That in itself is a trumpet blast of liberty. It is also a work in progress.

Renouncing evil and the spiritual powers which corrupt this world is a lifelong task; one we come back to again and again; one which deeply informs the life choices we make. Evil is everything which prevents the flourishing of this planet and all beings which live in and on her. Corruption is the way humans undermine the love and work of God by grasping and grabbing for ourselves. It's difficult to get out of bed without in some way engaging with evil and corruption.

This morning I wrote this sermon on my laptop which uses a lithium battery. Lithium extraction is very water intensive which is a deep concern, especially to the first nations people living in the areas where lithium exists. But of even greater concern is the cobalt and nickel that are necessary for the batteries to work. About half the world's supply of cobalt comes from the Congo, where 20% is extracted by hand and much of that by children working in the mines¹. And as you know, the Congo is facing an outbreak of Ebola, and separately UNICEF has declared a humanitarian crisis with more than 400,000 children facing imminent starvation. My laptop is not a morally neutral device – it directly connects me to people thousands of miles away who are suffering at least partly because of my desire to use a laptop.

When we join with Anna, Jonathan and Charlotte to renew our baptismal vows this morning we won't be saying the ones about renouncing evil. Why not? Because it is a done deal. We only get to publicly declare our renunciation of evil and corruption when we are baptized and confirmed. Our enrollment in the Kin-dom of God is a result of our decision to renounce evil and all that is connected with it. But the practice of doing so, the everyday renunciation of evil takes practice and it takes work.

It is the everyday renunciation of evil that is laid out in the five vows that we will renew together. They are written in such even-handed prose

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cobalt-children-mining-democratic-republic-congo-cbs-news-investigation/>

that they lose some of their urgency and immediacy but together they provide a program for the living out of the Pentecostal trumpet-blast.

We vow to continue as we are in gathering for teaching, fellowship, prayer and Eucharist. It seems so very ordinary and perhaps even mundane, but it is in the community of one another that we not only draw closer to God but that we learn to live in counter-cultural ways. Here with each other we can practice the skills of living in peace and harmony, of dealing with conflict, of loving those who seem initially unlovable. Here we can support one another in finding ways of living which are less oppressive, which bring love instead of hatred and which resist the subtle temptations of evil. And it is in the sacrament of the Eucharist that we become turned into God as God comes into us.

Our second vow is to continue to resist evil, and whenever we sin to turn back to God. As we grow in the spiritual life our awareness of our own failings grows rather than lessens because we become more attuned to the possibility of life in the Spirit. The more we are sanctified, the more we notice things we never noticed before; places where we fail to be as loving as Christ, times when we lack integrity, habits that prevent us from fully living out the grace and love of God. Every time we turn toward God it becomes a little easier, and every time we turn away from God, that too becomes a little easier. So repenting and turning back to God brings us new life and it also makes it easier to do it next time.

The third vow is a difficult one for most of us. “Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?” We commit ourselves to talking about God’s love not just to each other but to others as well. “Proclaim” has a sense of shouting out not mumbling apologetically. This is difficult because we don’t want to seem to be imposing our sense of reality on anyone else, we don’t want to be seen to be proselytizing. Yesterday I saw a group of Jehovah’s Witnesses

walking down the street going door to door. I admire them for that. I'm not sure that I could do it. But if I am truly keeping this vow, then I will be looking for opportunities to introduce my own experience of God into conversation; I will be looking for opportunities to invite people into closer relationship with God or with us, his church.

Now to the vow I started with – to seek and serve God in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus gave us this uncomfortable picture of our neighbor in the Good Samaritan. Our neighbor is not just those we know and enjoy; our neighbor is the person we don't know, the person we don't like, the one we find kinds scary. Our neighbor is the child mining cobalt so that I may write my sermon. My neighbor is the child dying of starvation as well as the unhoused person who gets drunk or upset and shouts in the park. And yes, even the President and those who work with him, they are my neighbor. I can't help all these people like the Good Samaritan did. I can't put them on my donkey and take them to urgent care. But I can pray for them. I can surround the White House with white light and with love. I can personally help the few that I can, and use the incredible power of prayer to help those I cannot.

And finally, “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” Seeking and striving for justice means being active in the public square. It means being an involved and educated citizen. It means speaking up when you see injustice happening. Striving for justice and peace is more than providing clean water – it's working to see who is polluting the river and getting them to stop.

When we live into these vows we will truly be sounding the “trumpet-blast of liberty” not just for ourselves but for all beings. It is a big task, it is a life-changing task, but it is one for which we are uniquely called and uniquely prepared. We have been given the Holy Spirit to lead and guide

us; the Holy Spirit whose intention is always the creation of wise, compassionate, and healthy people and communities.

Let us pray.

Dear God as we make and remake our vows to you today, we ask for the outpouring of your Spirit so that the Christ may manifest through us with a trumpet-blest of liberty for all beings. *Amen*