November 8, 2026 – The Rev. Rick Bellows

Today is a special day for me. It probably won't seem like a big deal to you, but I say here is a party I can celebrate that you probably pass by. Today is November 8th, the anniversary of my baptism. That's it, the 67th anniversary of my baptism. That is why I'm going to talk about Holy Baptism today. My baptism happened right in this sanctuary, though I don't know where. I have rarely seen the baptistry used. I was told that the plans for this building didn't include a baptistry, and no one noticed until it was well under construction. When they did notice, they put it off to the side, far from it's usual place of honor up front where it is seen to be important, or in the back where it is seen to remind you of the power you have to be a Christian as you exit.

But most baptisms from Fr. Bill Hale's time through my time as rector, had a portable font that we would bring up and place front and center. I don't know if I was baptized at the portable font or the side font. It wasn't an occasion that was seen to be important enough for a picture, and by the time I asked, my parents didn't remember. (1:40)

I also don't know if it was a private baptism or during a service. Private baptism was all the rage back in the 1950s. But the 1979 Book of Common Prayer has rubrics that say baptism should be when the community is gathered. It is a community embracing a person. Baptism is also dying with Christ in his death so that you also rise with him in his resurrection. Therefore, it should generally be on a Sunday—everyone of them a celebration of the resurrection, or a feast day when it makes sense.

It doesn't always make sense. Take the Church of the Atonement's patronal feast, which is Good Friday, a fast day, When your feast day is a fast day, that makes it not so good a reason for a party, It is, however the best day of preparation for baptism at the preferred day since 1979 at the Easter Vigil on the eve of Easter, reviving the preferred day in the first few centuries of the church.

That hasn't caught on though for most of you. So other suitable feast days are the Feast of Pentecost when the church celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit, All Saint's Day when the church celebrates the impact of Easter on people's lives, the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord, which is the Sunday after January 6th, or on the day when the bishop visits the parish. If none of those work, any Feast Day or Sunday are fine.

But really it can be anytime, especially if it is in an emergency. That could be for a reason as when someone is being deployed to war, or if someone is sick and likely to die. Even at the last minute, any of us can take water, if there is none, the spit in your mouth will do, and baptize the dieing marking the sign of the cross with the wetness, and saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." If possible, you could then say the Lord's Prayer. Afterward report the baptism to your church. If the person is still living, they would be anointed with chrism which is scented oil, blessed by the bishop to be used at baptism as a sign of the unity of the church. Everyone baptized in the diocese is anointed with the same chrism, by a priest or bishop marking the sign of the cross on the forehead, saying, "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. Amen."

There is also conditional baptism, where the priest would say, "If you are not already baptized, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." This may be

done if someone is from a branch of the church that doesn't believe in the Trinity, or if no one remembers if a person was baptized. We are very careful not to baptize a person more than once because St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (4:3f) encouraged the church to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." through one baptism.

Now let's quickly look at the service in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Turn to page 299.

The normal baptismal service begins with a daialogue just like every Holy Eucharist,

You say the words so much that you probably never thought about starting with one of the dialogues of equally powerful words. The celebrant says,

"Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And the people just as powerfully say,

"And blessed be [God's] kingdom, now and for ever. Amen."
At baptism the dialogue continues

Celebrant: There is one Body and one Spirit;

People: There is one hope in God's call to us;

Celebrant: One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism;

People: One God and Father of all."

What one word do you hear in these words over and over again?

Right: **ONE.** This again emphasizes unity. Baptism is a powerful unifying force in the universe. YET, the service begins with a dialogue, acknowledging we have different voices that are nonetheless united. Dialogue proclaiming Oneness. A beautiful balance.

After the sermon the baptismal party processes to the font, for the presentation and examination of the candidates. One or more people present each person to be baptized. If the person is an infant or is unable to speak for themselves then godparents present and face examination on behalf of the person. The examination includes the renunciations of evil in various forms and proclamations of faith in Jesus Christ.

(If there is time, go over the examination.)

Then comes the baptismal covenant. That's the package deal, the contract that lays it all out. And the baptized join those about to be baptized in reciting what one commits to in baptism.

But we've run out of time, so you'll just have to invite me back when November 8th falls on a Sunday.

OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL READING:

First is the summary of faith: the Apostles Creed that describes our belief in God as understood in the Trinity. Then there are 5 questions.

In the Book of Acts when the church began, this is what they did: they continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers? The church responds they will keep doing what the church has done from the start.

[[[[Normally I would argue that is way too conservative. "Yah, we'll do what the church always did." Reminds me of those words that kill more churches now than ever before. "We can't move that cross, because it has always been there. We can't stop the clergy sitting on the right, because we always did it that way." This doesn't take into account the dynamic progressive power wielded by the apostles' teaching, prayer, and even the Eucharistic bread which feeds change]]]].

The conversation continues: "Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?" I call this question of Christian greatness. It doesn't say will you be perfect. It says, when you notice your sin will you stop. That is what makes a saint. Awareness and responsiveness.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good
News of God in Christ? Will you hog this good news of God in Jesus Christ or share it?

Will you look for the absolute best in your neighbor? Serve them to draw the best out, and love them as yourself?
The questions are getting harder,looking for traction as the rubber meets the road.

"Will you strive for justice and peace among all
People?" It doesn't mean will you strive for justice that punishes the guilty. It means will you give preferential treatment to the poor, those without privilege or power, those crushed by many systems of power. Correcting that is what the question is asking you to commit to: Help the disadvantaged.

Then we get to the second part: "Will you respect the dignity of every human being?" Thiis means will you respect the person's sovereignty over choosing their helpmate? God did from the start, for the very first human in the second creation story. It means will you respect their sovereignty over their pronouns even if it goes against your sense of good grammar? I notice that quibbling over pronouns isn't what the election was about. It was about that for me. Here are other ways we step on people's dignity: we mispronounce their names. I find this especially true for the many doctors I've seen since I was diagnosed with PD. I challenge you to learn how your doctors' names are pronounced and your neighbors' names, too. These things are just a few small ways you can respect people's dignity.

Now we haven't considered the prayer over the water, and the end of the baptismal rite. Invite me back the next time November 5th is on a Sunday. In the meantime, keep on continuing in the tradition of the great dialogue in which baptism finds itself placed.