

**Another Baptism Promise?
Mayflower Church
Rev. Sarah Campbell
February 5, 2023**

Left brain! You get to take a break this morning. This is a right brain kind of morning at Mayflower! Every Sunday when you get your name tag and then hang up your coat in the hallway, feel free to stuff your logos mind, left brain, in a pocket, for a spell for safe keeping, and come walk through the gates of prayer and let your mythos mind have its time for a while.

What we do together here in worship is mostly right brain activity. Like the arts, poetry, and music, we do our story, song, ritual, that help us, mostly unconsciously and intuitively, make meaning and make connections between everything. The left brain is about the rational, pragmatic. That has its place in our lives, of course!, but not so much in worship.

All known human societies have mythology, those stories about events that may or may not have actually happened that way but the people know the stories are true; that the stories shed light on the deepest levels of human experience. And all known human societies have rituals that point to the liminal thresholds of reality; to that which renders us speechless; to the holy.

When we had our first communion ritual after well over a year of separation due to Covid, you, some of you, some of the most rational, left brain people around, came forward with tears in your eyes. I won't even try to find words for what that was about.... It's beyond words...The sacramental language for our rituals of communion and baptism are often beautiful, sometimes poetic but they are *not* an attempt to explain or define. That would be impossible.

Now you may say: preacher, you used to say, come to Mayflower where you don't have to leave your brain at the door... Where critical, questioning thought is welcome....

Do I contradict myself? Absolutely!!

Yes, thank God for the age of European enlightenment, the Western headwaters of logic, mathematics, science...Where would we be without that great river, let's call it STEM? But it has its limitations. It doesn't sufficiently honor the unconscious, the intuitive, the emotional aspects of the human being; nor that energy or power which is ultimately unnamable, what William James call "the More". Who can define or measure the wondrous power of love?

Here's a concern. When we live in a world that privileges or only accepts left brain, logos thinking, isn't it all too easy to objectify the natural world? to not FEEL the sacredness, of the

animals, the water, the earth.. ; to not FEEL our deeper-than-logic-connection to them; to not FEEL the awesome oneness of everything, of Being-itself.

On this day, here together, we give ourselves over to two communal rituals that our ancestors practiced and that we hope generations to come will practice. Communion and baptism.

Baptism is an ancient Christian tradition that says so much, through sacramental poetry, myth, song and ritual. It says and we hear it! that on *this* day:

We are lifting this child up to the universe and proclaiming “you are God’s beloved! and always will be!”

We are welcoming this child into this particular community but also into the community of Christ of all times and places.

We are promising this child to care for them and to raise them on the Jesus path.

What I wonder if we don’t hear so clearly, and that we should, is the place of water in this ritual. The miracle of life giving water and the miracle of this child are linked. This ritual doesn’t just use water as a tool, but it acknowledges the holiness and the interconnectedness of the human and the earth and its waters. In ritual we don’t spell everything out, but let your mind leap... amniotic fluid, the Mississippi watershed and the creek just one block from where we are right now, our northern geography of lakes, the water we bless the beloved bodies with after death, and so much more.... In this ritual, let us be conscious of the “I Thou” relationship with the water, rather than an “I It” relationship with the water.

And I wonder...dew changes have been made to this communal ritual through the years, as it should be... we still use the language of the UCC book of worship, the beautiful trinitarian poetry shaped by Budd, the song Marty Haugen composed ...such wonderful elements of the ritual that we carry forward... but I wonder whether we should include in our congregational promise, something like, not these words but something like this... “We love you more than you can ever imagine and we promise, we promise, we promise that will do everything within our power to save this mother earth and her waters for you and your children and your children’s children.”

There is something else that needs to be said from this pulpit and this morning feels like the right time.

There is some deep hurt that needs to be acknowledged and really heard.

In the bible story Jesus says: “let the little children come to me.” But we closed the doors.

There are differences of opinion, always!, including among parents of young children, but some parents felt that when they needed it most during the pandemic, church was not open to them-- quite literally, at one point, when vaccines were not yet available to young children. That was painful. We, and I include myself, the team that made these hard decisions in an impossible time, during a once in a once in a life time pandemic?, a team that we were and are incredibly fortunate to have!, were trying to keep everyone safe and alive, including the young ones. But what we DIDN'T do, and we apologize for this from the bottom of our hearts, is acknowledge, in sermon, story, song, ritual, how very hard this was, the pain, the impossibility of it all. The locked doors.... Please hear this. Trying to do our best, we caused pain. We are sorry.

Every congregation I know is concerned about “families coming back”. *This* acknowledgement is less about that issue, which is far more complex, and more about hearing, communally, the hurt, pain, anger, of some of you. We are committed to listening to all of you. If you have more to say about it, please let me or Rev. Briones know.

Let us all join together now and move into the future. The congregation is fully committed to you. We now have a wonderful full time Faith Formation Director.