

BAPTISMAL PROMISES



JEREMIAH D. WILLIAMSON



“Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us and makes us members of Christ’s body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 858).

Through baptism we become members of the church, much in the same way a baby becomes a citizen of a country by being born in it. This is also one of the reasons why we practice infant baptism—no matter how small you are, no matter how mature your understanding of the world, you are welcomed and celebrated into the household of God.

Baptism traditionally happens at the beginning of a life of ministry with Jesus and God’s people. Through baptism, we join a community of belief and practice, with the understanding that doing so means we are wholly committed to God.

Within the service of baptism, we find the Baptismal Covenant, which contains eight questions that highlight essential aspects of Christian life and practice (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 304). The first three baptismal questions are rooted in the faith of the church. Before we can talk about what we promise to do for God, we say out loud who God is and how God is working in the world. The answers we give to these questions are the same words we say together in the Apostles’ Creed. These words, beliefs, and deep hope bind us together in one community and family of faith. Everything else we promise to do for God and each other hangs on these first three answers.

The remaining five questions—and our answers—reflect and remind us of our commitments to our community of faith. These are known as the Baptismal Promises.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

The promise to continue the apostles' teaching and fellowship—of living out a life in community with other disciples of Jesus—is vital. In the second chapter of Acts, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the followers of Jesus, and the church is born. Peter preaches the gospel in the streets of Jerusalem and 3,000 people are baptized into the new church. The author of Acts gives us the first description of the community of the baptized: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” This is the picture of the earliest church. And it is an image you probably recognize.

When you make this promise, you vow to be a committed member of a Christian community. We need each other. Participation in the life of a church is essential for the health and growth of our faith. Together we create and sustain Christian communities in which we all gather to learn, spend time with one another, break bread, and pray. Your faith community is the result of generations of Christians who have generously dedicated time, talents, and financial resources to further the mission of God in this world.

Your participation in the life of your congregation is essential. By devoting ourselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to the prayers, and to each other, we provide an alternative to the things in this world that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. We embrace an alternative to the isolation that plagues our world, to the separation that confines people to lives of loneliness, and to the individualism that harms the soul. We experience another way, beyond selfish consumerism that reduces people to the value of their bank accounts, beyond fearful nationalism that denies the image of God in people beyond our borders, and beyond the racism and prejudice that violates Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. And the church says, "I will, with God's help."

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

You are called to persevere in resisting evil. And that is no small task. Evil is a slippery enemy, a notoriously difficult entity to identify and resist. Most often we notice only the most extraordinary examples of evil. While giving evil a face provides us with a target for our anger and frustration, unfortunately, once that happens, we no longer focus on our Christian duty: to persevere in resisting evil. Instead, we arm ourselves and oppose those we see as evil. We fool ourselves into