



## ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON  
11-6-16

I'm asking you to recall your first love – your first love of the church. Something in your memory of a time, incident that drew you, moved you, spoke of God to you. It might be a midnight Christmas Eve service, a happy baptism, a normal Sunday watching people come back from communion.....Your first love, noticing the spirit speaking to you.

Please share.....

I can share with you my memory – this might spark memories for you. John and I were newly married young 20 somethings when we moved to Dubois and were invited to attend St. Thomas Episcopal Church. We went, and kept going, and after a few months somehow found ourselves out in the woods to gather some firewood with the priest there – Burdette Stampley. As we worked John reflected that he had no memory of being baptized as he'd been an infant and he regretted that. Burdette said that could be remedied, pulled out a book of Common Prayer from his pick-up, walked us down to the small creek and proceeded to rebaptize John. I stood by a bit incredulous and finally said, quite begrudgingly, “well you might as well do me also.” With that sort of attitude I listened as I promised to attend worship, to take part in communion, to proclaim the word of God, to take part in ministry to my neighbors and work for justice. I have to say I gave a big gulp as I spoke those words. They lingered with me...they formed me....and as I tell adults at pre-baptism meetings..look where I am today.

For that became and is my first love of the church.....the ministry of the baptized. The ministry of all the baptized -it's a vision of us all working for good together. It's a vision that embraces such a large community. And here is a visual piece of art showing what I think that might look like. (Picasso's Circle Dance). Do you see us holding hands and dancing together, dancing together with the dove – the Holy Spirit as our center – our guide, the spirit in our midst.

On this day we celebrate All Saints Day – a day that celebrates each of us and our common identity – the identity of those of us sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, of those of us claimed as God's own forever. As it said in Ephesians – we were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. Many of you know that remains a favorite moment of mine – when I trace the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized, using holy oil and marking them as Christ's own forever.

And I think about topical medications – we apply them to our skin and the oils seep into our bloodstream, into our bodies, into our being to heal us. So I think of us sealed by the oil of baptism and the Holy Spirit. We are sealed into a faith community, we are sealed into the ministry of the baptized.

And I believe we need each other in this faith community and one reason why we do is found in the Luke reading, those lines that are known as the beatitudes. Today I read those lines as a description of us in beloved community. When we are poor, when we are hungry, when we weep, when we are struggling, we connect with each other and find food, solace, arms to hold us, words to comfort us. And when we are rich, and full, and laughing, we share that together also, knowing that all of these moments are temporary and our lives will have changes. But still we hold on to each other. We hold hands and connect with our posse sharing our faithfulness, sharing our life, supporting, consoling, challenging each other.

And in this good news vision of community we learn to keep extending ourselves to those enemies who curse us, who try to strike us, who make demands of us. We invite them also into our beloved community. We make space, we let them hold our hands and join in the dance, if they are willing. If they are willing.....

That's how faith community is formed. We are willing to receive seal of the Holy Spirit upon our heads, and the cleansing water of baptism, and then we join in the dance and are formed.

That's what the ritual and prayers are about that we will share in in a few minutes. Our growing youth are going to pledge to be a caring community for each other. They are going to appreciate having their parents in their life, but they are also going to ask each other to be there for them in new and broadening ways.

We need each other. We need the faith community. We need to dance together around the Holy Spirit. And at all times, in all places we need to say...

Thanks be to God.