



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

## ***Of Carrot Cake and Epiphany***

The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

January 10, 2016

Before carrot cake was one of my favorites desserts, it was an epiphany for me. I don't think I'd ever even heard of it before reaching adulthood. I don't remember the first time I tasted it or what it took to convince me to try it. All I know is that it changed my life...well, that may be a bit of an exaggeration, but it certainly changed my understanding of carrots. Before that, they were a crunchy vegetable, unless they had had the heck cooked out of them. Then they were a rather tasteless mushy bit of color on a plate, often paired with equally mushy peas. Who knew that when turned into a baking ingredient and paired with cream cheese icing, carrots become heavenly goodness - not to mention a way to justify having cake for breakfast. Since my carrot cake epiphany, I have developed a much greater appreciation for the inherent wonder of carrots and look for new ways to use them, roasted with ginger, carrot soufflé, carrot soup. Carrots have taught me that Epiphany, that experience of the unexpected awareness of God as what happened when the three kings, the wise men, went looking for a new political ruler. This Epiphany is like Jesus baptism, a revelation of some inherent divine quality that has always been there, just awaiting discovery. Carrots were always more than I knew, just as this baby, Magdalena Rose, is more than an adorable tiny human.

So let us take this opportunity to look at a couple of things and allow them to be more than we thought they were. Starting with baptism. What is it? What do we think it is? What has the church, in its many forms, said about baptism? The Gospels and apostle Paul spoke of baptism as a means of being cleansed of sin, to be prepared for a new way of life. It was a holy bath to wash away something bad. This way of thinking about baptism through the centuries caused it to evolve into an entrance requirement for heaven. The fear that someone, particularly a child, would be unwelcome or unworthy of heaven without baptism was, I think, really wrong and a more than a little bit manipulative. Clark, my theology professor stood against that way of thinking by say that baptism is "heaven proclaiming, not heaven procuring." This way of thinking says that it reveals something about our fundamental relationship with God - it is always there, we are always worthy, we have always and will always be loved and baptism is a way of affirming that.

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But let's consider some other ways of thinking of this today...Jesus was submerged in the water - in his time, a life threatening experience. Deep water was always considered a place of unseen threats and danger and often death. The deep was a scary place. Jung would have seen in it the deep darkness of our unconscious minds. What if baptism were thought of a courageous event that begins our search for the as yet unknown, a journey the deep recesses of our human existence. I'm reminded of the scene in Star Wars, the original, in which Luke Skywalker, finds himself in a dark place and confronts Darth Vader, only to discover himself under the mask. Baptism can be that intention confrontation of the dark side of humanity. Only then can we become something better.

But it can also be thought of in other new ways. We spend our days in a constant roar of noise. It's too distracting here on the surface, too much static and misdirection. What if baptism were our way to go beneath the noisy surface to find a calm and peaceful truth. Go deep and listen, suspended in the buoyancy of God's waters of creation. This way of understanding baptism makes it a perpetual practice, not a onetime event. Baptism becomes the intentional break from life's frenzy to reconnect with our divine nature, freed from the world's noise and grime. It becomes a space of epiphany.

In the quiet of baptismal waters, we rediscover God's image in us. That image is what gives us the capacity to live joyous creative lives, to live as peacemakers. It is the impulse toward generosity and love and compassion. It's who we truly are. Baptism washes away the impediments to self-knowledge. It is the ritual way of claiming the divine image within us. That is certainly what it was for Jesus. His baptism resulted in the affirmation of who he is - God's beloved. He is how we know who we are.

Today Magdalena Rose won't need to brave deep waters, hers will be a gentler ritual. But what begins for her today is every bit as consequential. In one way of thinking about today, she is becoming a member of the church, but that is really incomplete. Today she will become a part of what God is doing in the world. She becomes our sister in compassion and peace-making. She becomes a part of a mission dedicated to saving the world from itself with love. It's a big job and we will need her innocence and sweetness. Our job, as her family and her church is to help her learn about the world while holding onto her identity as God's beloved child. We can help her discover the "gift of joy and wonder" in everything around her.

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Magdalena's presence with us today is an important reminder of why we are all here. The church has too often been a place to which people have come to assure their hopes for the afterlife. They have brought their needs and fears, confessed their sins, received absolution and communion. Church in that way is kind of like raw carrots, not nearly all it can be. Church is meant to be a transformative community, dedicated to creating a better version of human culture - one in line with God's love.

From the very beginning, the church was a community inspired by Jesus, by his love and courage, his wondrous presence, his unlimited invitation, his willingness to see beauty and worth in the least loved members of society. The church was inspired by his challenge to all of us to discover the kingdom that was already in our midst, lurking below the surface of the baptismal waters. Somewhere along the line, the church became a gatekeeper, intent on identifying any who didn't meet some standards that were never a part of the original plan. The church became a dictator of doctrine instead of an ever expanding community of love and welcome. So for those among us who have thought of the church as a place of rules and an broker of heaven, let's imagine beyond those limitation and consider it as a community in which joy abounds and love spills out the doors. The church is meant to be a place in which we discover and practice love and loving. That's why we need the Magdalena's of the world. Children know how to love until they are taught something else. Perhaps, her baptism today is not so much to cleanse and buffer her from the world's grime, but to give us all a chance to wash off what happened to us along the way of our growing up and discover under the water the pure, laughing child that we were and are meant to be.

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