

**Sermon: The Rev. Christopher Bishop  
St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Radnor, PA  
17 Pentecost, Oct 9, 2011**

**Lectionary:**

[Exodus 32:1-14](#)

[Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23](#)

[Philippians 4:1-9](#)

[Matthew 22:1-14](#)

**Why does liturgy matter?** This is the question I lived in all week, as we approached this Sunday. First we are baptizing a baby, one of my favorite parts of being a priest. And we are so thankful as a congregation to have been given this gift in Kyle's baptism by Kara and Kudzai, and their wonderful family and friends. At the same time this week we begin our *Sacred Portion* program. Our inquiry into stewardship-- taking care of God's people and God's world with what God has already given us—what it is, and what can it offer us?

**Then it gets even more interesting.** Brian Penny, Kathy Wynn, and I elected to begin *Sacred Portion* by inviting someone who inspires us because of what they are out doing in their lives. Specifically someone whose personal story speaks to making good on the core Christian promise of seeking social justice—a question of stewardship. To show that the portion we are called to return back to God for the building up of God's Kingdom, anywhere we do it and however it occurs, really is sacred. And that we are returning it whenever we are about the business of loving, caring for, even protecting God's people when necessary.

**Now, these are 3 things: baptism, stewardship, social justice,** are each powerful experiences in and of themselves. And now add to that the lectionary and you get a glimpse of what's possible in this experience, our liturgy today. How can all these seemingly disparate threads be bound into one faithful knot that's really in the end about thanking and glorifying God? In our readings we have the early Jewish people wandering in the desert, dealing with, working out their relationship with God in real time through the rhythms of

their lives and experience. Jus like us. And in the Gospel we have the famous, feel-good feast of all humanity invited to the banquet, sometimes evoked in descriptions of the KOG. But it's really the second part of this reading that gets my attention.

**At a banquet where everybody is invited**, what's with the guy without the wedding robe being tied up and thrown out? Who is he *not* being, that he is so unwelcome there? What's the wedding robe? The Jewish commentaries of the Talmud teach that wedding robes in that era symbolized the soul. Well, what if the wedding robe is our soul, and as such is the part of us that has us say "Yes" to loving, taking care of, putting something on the line for, being really present with the people around us? Aren't all the people at the king's banquet the ones who said yes? Behold the man who says no to loving, just cause.

**Maybe the guy who never bothers** to put on his wedding robe is off in his own world, faking it. We've all been that person, right? Maybe Jesus is trying to say something about the matter of presence, of really being in relationship with people: to treat all with dignity, to "seek and serve Christ in all persons." That yeah, in this huge banquet, let's call forth that in us which is great with people. Loving them. Listening to them. Pulling for them. Knowing that there is something really big on the line and that is the health and well-being of the whole creation we share. Because it is that big, as big as Kyle and the whole blessed world he will inherit from us.

**Baptism is perhaps the most generous**, loving act of stewardship we have. It's nothing less than the beginning of the life-long embrace of a soul by a community in the spirit of God. And, if I tease it out a little, the reason I thought of Andrew as our guest speaker today is because of what I see as his baptismal covenant in action. Andrew and I were in seminary here in Philadelphia for 2 years. He was one of the smartest, most heart-felt students of theology there, and we began a friendship and a conversation that continues to today. We were preaching partners, and I know the power of Andrew's expression.

**After graduating from Lutheran**, Andrew has been involved in one social justice project after another. Now he is participating in the powerful and merciful act of helping free the innocent from prison. Freeing the prisoners. And it got me to thinking about what we say in baptism: "In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection." We are baptized into the death of Christ. We are profoundly related to the experience of life and death, their relationship, their inextricable bondedness. Baptism is, in

a sense, a rebirth, the freeing of all prisoners, an amnesty of the heart, maybe. The free offering of freedom from the tyranny of the self, and incorporation into the eternal Body of God, the Body of Christ, who we are being when we are kind and other-seeking.

**A baptism is the perfect place** to have a conversation about what it means to take a stand in our lives. To live outwardly that which we profess, to put everything on the line. Because ultimately its not just about you and me and us getting what we want or need—it's about Kyle. He is heir to the same world, created by God that we received, but with our mark on it. What we did or did not do etched on it. That is the world, the process of becoming, that we are baptizing and welcoming Kyle and the whole network of relationships that constitute his life, into today.

**So, my friends, let's all be *in* this liturgy**, this come-as-you-are banquet, together today. Were we can be present to all of life and how we are in it. If you're skeptical or disgruntled, great, be in it. If you're happy and joyous, great, be in it. But get how amazing it is that we are given this opportunity to gather around and celebrate the creation and care of this little boy in the spirit of God today. And however we conceive of that God, bringing all that we are, our worlds, with us. This piece of life that we share here, this liturgy and this life, is a chance for us to listen, to renew, to be *in* our own baptismal vows to see what God is saying to us....

**Amen.**