



Essentials

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts on the Seventh Sunday after Easter, May 28, 2017.

Discipline yourselves, keep alert. God of all grace who has called you to eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you. 1 Peter 5: 8, 10

There are two essential things that Christ requires of us: we are to be baptized and we are to remember him in the sharing of bread and wine. These are the two great sacraments of baptism and the Holy Eucharist.

Today, we are bringing Matthew Albert and Andrew Oliver Chabin Griffith into full membership in the church through Holy Baptism. While they were welcomed into the world at the time of their birth, they are now being welcomed into the life and fellowship of church. They belong to a vast throng of souls going back countless generations who have sought to follow the example of Christ who gave himself up for us that we may live. The best description of Jesus is, *a man for others*.

Christ is most real to us each time we gather in his name to share the bread and wine. Today is the fiftieth anniversary of the first time I celebrated this great sacrament of the Eucharist. I had been ordained to the priesthood the day before in the magnificent setting of the Washington National Cathedral. You would think that my first celebration of the Eucharist would have been in a similar liturgical setting, but it wasn't. I was leading a retreat in a rustic cabin in rural Maryland. Instead of a beautiful altar made of stone or wood, all we had was a ping-pong table that we set up as an altar. For the very first time, I blessed the bread and wine and shared it with those who knelt around the table. It was in a similar very simple setting that this great sacrament began at the last supper when Christ shared the bread and wine with his disciples as a way to remember him. As one of the two great sacraments of the church, the Eucharist is centered on thanksgiving and offering. In this we are giving thanks to God for what we have in the life and teachings of Christ and we offer ourselves in return in God's service.

Andrew and Matthew are too young to comprehend the significance of this day. We were all born in a state of innocence. It wasn't until we learned about good and evil, right and wrong and chose to do what we knew was wrong that we entered the world of sin. Matthew and Andrew's parents and sponsors are making promises on their behalf to renounce all forms of evil and to put their trust in God's grace and love. They are promising to seek and serve Christ in all people, loving their neighbor as themselves. They are promising to strive for justice and peace among all people and to respect the dignity of every human being. Matthew and Andrew are growing up in a world of many challenges. Right now, all they know is the love of their parents and big brother. They will learn that there is both good and evil in the world. It is the responsibility of their family and sponsors to support them in standing for what is right and good and true against all that is wrong and evil and false. In the first letter of Saint Peter we are encouraged to discipline ourselves and keep alert. We are assured that God will support and strengthen us in the fight against sin and evil.

An essential core value that Christians need to know and practice is compassion. This is an essential quality in the teachings of world religions. Compassion and justice are inevitably linked. You can't have one without the other. Compassion is far more than kindness; it is about treating each other equally as brothers and sisters. Though we are created with different genders, identities and colors and different cultures and conditions, we all belong to the family of God and therefore are all deserving of God's grace and love.

My hope for Andrew and Matthew is that they will continue to grow up in a world where kindness, consideration, tolerance and compassion are valued. Upheld by the love of their parents, Kim and Diana and their brother Stuart. They will need support in standing for what is right and good against all that is wrong and evil.

As Christians we are of the conviction that the world is not going around in meaningless circles. Instead, we believe that we are progressing toward a higher quality of life in which truth and justice are upheld. This is not a hopeless aim, but an expression of confidence in God's purposes for us. By emphasizing compassion and justice, we glorify God. As instruments of God's grace we bring others closer to the heart of God. We want to encourage Matthew and Andrew to radiate God's grace in all they say and do. If they expect as much of themselves as they expect of others it will bring out the best in everyone. I've learned not to be too hasty in relying on first impressions of people until I get to know them. That way I often discover that they have an interesting story to tell if I just take the time to listen.

We were all created to glorify God. Because God knows and cares for each and every one of us, we must never be casual in what we offer back to God. A good place to begin is with a genuine sense of humility. There are more than enough "me first" people in the world. Our approach to the presence of God is always in humility. The person of Jesus Christ is the best model for being fully human. In him our old self is redeemed and made worthy in the presence of God.