

**Sunday, February 26, 2012**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – "Servant of All"**

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Who wants to be first?

Isn't that what we are all supposed to want?

To be the best, the brightest, the favorite, the star.

Well, what if it means being a servant to all?

Anybody want that?

The problem with following Jesus is that he makes everything so painfully clear.

There is no ambiguity in his direction.

It is quite simple.

The way that you treat children is the way that you treat God.

Children are, of course, symbolic of the most vulnerable among us.

Most people don't mind helping children because they are so charming.

But what about our fellow human beings who fall a bit short of charming?

One writer said that "if we could all hear one another's prayers, God might be relieved of some of his burdens."

All over the world, people are praying: for peace; enough food to eat and clean water to drink; increased love in their lives; cures for diseases of every kind; an end to loneliness and despair; and joy to fill their hearts.

We don't necessarily need divine intervention to answer many of those prayers.

We have the capabilities ourselves.

By God's grace, we are endowed with the ability to do many of the things that we want God to do.

Through our own baptism, we receive the gift of grace.

Donna Schaper says that "true grace is when we are almost driven to show others what it means to be secure.

We are compelled to be different than what we were; so drawn and magnetized are we to the high bar of true humanity."

True grace transforms us.

Instead of being burnt out, we are lit.

Instead of being sad, we are happy.

Instead of being bored, we are engaged.

Instead of being anxious, we are grace-filled.

Grace, technically, refers to the free and unmerited act through which God restores his estranged creatures to himself.

Most Christian churches agree on this concept, however, there is much debate as to how we come by this grace.

Some believe that grace is earned, while others believe that grace is a gift from God.

I believe that grace is the manifestation of God within us – it is our living up to the highest human potential – living into our creation as images of God.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer distinguished between “cheap grace” and “costly grace.”

“Cheap grace,” he argued “is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without discipline, communion without confession, absolution without confession. Cheap grace,” he said, “is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”

“Costly grace, however, is the treasure hidden in the field-the pearl of great price. Costly grace is the gospel, which must be sought again and again, the gift, which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. It is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. Costly grace is the incarnation of God – the sanctuary of God.”

Again, through our baptism we receive the gift of God’s grace.

We just pledged our support for Calder and his family in their Christian life.

Let’s take a moment to renew our own baptismal vows, as a starting point for our Lenten journey.

These words come from a renewal service I participated in a few weeks ago:

We are the people of God, marked by water, claimed by the Spirit, precious and honored in God’s sight.

We are the Body of Christ, gathered for joyful worship, fed by the life of God in our lives.

Strengthened for our ministries, we are a community of faith, seeing the holy in the ordinary and being made new as we renew our pledges of loyalty to God.

God created new life forms and brought them up from the waters of chaos, embraced them and called them good.

Moses led the people of Israel from captivity to freedom as they crossed through the waters of the Red Sea and the people marched through the Jordan River waters on their way to the Promised Land.

Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, and then offered to a woman at a Samaritan well, living waters from his own being which refreshes and sustains us all.

In his life, teaching, miracles, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ welcomed all and had a special fondness for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, and all those who knew that they were not self-sufficient, but came seeking God's grace to live in ways that are full and meaningful, joyous and loving.

We follow Jesus in our baptism, marking a starting place for new life and new ways of being.

We join him in loving God and loving others, in serving God and serving others.

Let us prepare our hearts and minds to see, feel and hear once again the vows of baptism, which were made at our baptism by others, renewed at our confirmation and renewed again when we entered into covenant with the church in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let us remember to whom we belong.

Let us claim anew our identity as Christ's own.

*Please answer 'I Do' after each question:*

Do you renew and affirm the promises made at your baptism?

*I do.*

Do you recognize the call of God to be God's people always?

*I do.*

Do you embrace the way of Jesus Christ in faith and ministry?

*I do.*

Do you accept the nurture of the Holy Spirit who enlivens your spirit each day?

*I do*

Do you extend hospitality to all others who seek a liberating faith in and relationship with God?

*I do.*

In renewing your baptism vows, remember your baptism as a mark of acceptance and welcome into the care of Christ's church, where you may begin again your Christian faith and life.

Remember, always, that you are named by God, claimed by Christ and proclaimed by the Holy Spirit as God's beloved child.