

Little Amy goes to bed every night with the same routine  
She has to say goodnight to everyone and everything in a certain order.  
Her glass of water has to fit into the routine just at the right moment,  
and when prayers are said, there is a proper order to that as well.  
Whenever the nighttime formula is disrupted, displeasure is voiced.  
If daddy forgets to pray for her grandmother or stuffed animals,  
a frown crosses her face along with recognizable gloomy gestures and words.  
One knows if the nighttime liturgy has become compromised.  
One knows when she can go to sleep, comforted that the family rites  
have been properly maintained.

So, it is with children, nighttime rituals are powerfully important.  
And so it is with teens, young adults, and older adults, as well.  
We all have need for rituals and traditions to assure us that all is well.

A friend of mine returned home from college one year for Easter  
Her five siblings, ranging in age from 15 to 26, were all home as well.  
Her family had a tradition of doing an Easter egg hunt, but this year,  
supposing the children to be too old, the 6 baskets were all prepared in advance,  
filled with Easter eggs already gathered.  
My friend said that she and her siblings mutinied  
and demanded that the Easter egg hunt never be suspended again.

How about you? What are some of the traditions, routines, rituals  
that you or your family engage in; what are some of the patterns of behavior,  
practices that you and other participate in regularly  
during normal days and on special occasions?

Perhaps it is the way you greet one another each day,  
the use of a table grace, bedtime prayers, table tent discussions?  
What are the rituals and traditions that exist in your family,  
your place of employment, your school, your community, church?  
On this day when the ritual of gathering for worship is precluded  
and alternative attempts are being made to satisfy the ritual  
the absence of that weekly rhythm upset our sense of who we are  
and how we are to make sense of these days and times.

The story is told of a missionary family  
returning home from years of service on New Guinea.

Shortly after the return, the father could not handle the transition  
to the new setting in the US and ran away from the family,  
leaving a wife and two young daughters.

As you might imagine, it was a traumatic time  
for the three abandoned family members.

The seven-year-old was given the task of setting the dinner table.  
She continued to set it for four.

About two weeks of this table-setting pattern,  
her mom put her arms around her daughter and said to her,  
*Honey, I'm sorry to tell you, but Daddy, isn't coming home anymore.*  
*You don't have to set the table for four.*"

The daughter looked up to her mother and said,  
*I know Mommy. I am not setting it for Daddy.*  
*I am setting it for Jesus. He will always be here.*

In the midst of a very troubling and vulnerable time,  
the little girl needed some assurance that she could see and enact, a ritual.  
She found part of it, at least, at the dinner table.

Baptism is such a ritual for Christians;  
a practice, a tradition, Christian rite that provides assurance and promise.  
The word comes from the Greek word *baptisma* - which means *washing in water*  
Christian baptism is a ritual action that joins ordinary water  
to the promised filled Word of Christ to become extraordinary –  
an event of God's grace-filled presence.

The NT provides several powerful images which teach us about baptism  
The NT considers baptism ... as a dying with Christ and a rising with Christ,  
... as being clothed in a new robe – Jesus Christ,  
covered by his forgiveness & righteousness  
...as adoption into a new family, a new birth, like being born anew.

Which is why those who first heard the story of the healing of the man born blind  
immediately thought - *this is what baptism is all about - a washing away of sin.*  
The man was born blind, and when washed, was set free from blindness.  
That is actually what happens to us in baptism.

We are all born into a sinful world and the water and word of baptism  
cleanses us; give us passage on Noah's Ark, if you will  
through the waters of chaos and death;  
enables us to pass through a "Red Sea" of our own bondage to sin and death  
to a new life of freedom in Christ.

Baptism is our a once-in-a-life-time washing  
which is the great ritual bath of the church.

On this strained day, in our stress filled world, as we consider all those rituals and traditions that give our lives meaning, hope, security and promise; as we see in the story of the man born blind the story of own blindness and the gift of our baptism; let's consider what rituals, practices, activities we might yet engage in that could aid us in living the baptized life.

How about creating a home altar? Perhaps with candles, a cross, a Bible and a color fabric reflecting the church year?

What might it mean if you were able to celebrate your baptism anniversary? Do you know the date?

How about lighting the baptism candle?

You could gather with others over Zoom and share some memories, prayers and scripture.

You could make the sign of the cross on each other's forehead saying;  
*Remember your baptism. You are a child of God.*

How might our lives be changed  
if we sought ways to remember our baptism in daily events?  
What if we made the sign of the cross on our forehead  
during the morning shower, or when the windshield wipers are on.  
When you wrap your child or ourselves in a towel or blanket  
what if we speak of being wrapped in Jesus love?  
After a quarrel or an act of disobedience,  
how about we wash the event away with a bath and say,  
*You are a new person again.*

Just a few minutes ago, in the telling of the gospel, you heard the Pharisees ask,  
*Are we also blind?*

The answer is *Yes*.

You, and me, all of us, are born blind, born in darkness and sin.

Thankfully because of Jesus, through baptism, we are reborn, enlightened,  
and now able to see what we could not see before -  
that God will not ever abandon us.

Even when God seems most absent, even out of sight,  
God is always there, speaking to us, present in our rituals,  
our everyday practices.

Thanks be to God. Amen.