

This morning, we are blessed to participate in the sacrament of baptism for a beloved adult child of God. I especially love adult baptisms because it is the sacramental celebration of an individual's emphatic "yes!" to God. It is a deliberate, prayerful choice for someone to join our community; to go all in with us as we go about our vocation as Christians, and an invitation to those of us who might have become complacent or stagnant in our faith journeys to recommit ourselves as we enter into new, intentional relationship with a beloved child of God.

It was Easter 1999 and my grandmother had just died. Easter was my grandma's day – the one day that both uncles, my two aunts and four cousins would gather with the four of us at grandma's house. She was the only grandparent I really knew growing up, and despite being nearly 23 years old, her death was pretty hard on me. Of the six grandchildren, I was fortunate to have spent the most time with her, and I felt particularly close to her.

So I decided that the best way to cope with my first holiday without her was to do something totally different. I invited my big brother to join me in a cross-country road trip to the Grand Canyon. I'd heard that there was a cool ecumenical gathering of Christians who celebrated a sunrise service on the south rim on Easter morning.

I was in the middle of my gap year between college and grad school, and it just so happened that I was between minimum wage jobs, too. Which is to say, I was a bit strapped for cash, but so was my brother, Will. So we planned that we'd camp out every night to save on hotels, and eat as many peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as we could tolerate to save on food. Since we were driving, we'd time our bathroom breaks along this 64 hour, 4200 mile, five day round-trip adventure with stops for filling up with gas. We had it all planned out.

So we packed the car with a tent, sleeping bags, a camping stove, a few loaves of bread, a case of lemon-lime Shasta, and our rain jackets. We left at dawn on Good Friday and were on our way.

The thing about God's grace is that it is relational. It is not unilateral, coercive or uniform. Its expression is perceived differently by each of us, and we each respond to it in our own unique ways.

The first day went well. Clear skies and no road construction. We blasted Indigo Girls, Depeche Mode, and of course U2. We alternated between taking the driver's seat and taking the back seat; when one of us one of us fell asleep, the other navigated.

Some time after nightfall, we'd made it to Fort Worth, TX. It was chilly when we were filling up with gas, and I wimped out of the whole camping idea. A Red Roof Inn was advertising nearby for \$39.99, and I said I'd spring for the hotel ... Will argued that I couldn't afford it, but when I mentioned he'd get a hot shower in the morning, I knew I had him.

The next morning, we were up before the sun. And as we made our way west, I noticed the cacti on the roadside had what looked like snow on its branches. It was decidedly colder at the next gas stop, and snowing. It was about an inch deep on the ground. But the roads were mostly clear, so we kept going.

As we starting climbing in elevation, it started snowing and accumulation was increasing. We agreed that since we'd get to the State Park by midnight, we'd find a hotel up at the rim and would already be there for the sunrise service. "We don't have reservations," he argued. "I'm not sleeping in the snow!" I countered.

I think I failed to mention that we are a planning family. It's a trait my brother and I both inherited ~ but Will takes it to a totally different level than I do. He's neurotic about needing to know what to expect because preparedness is a quality he values highly. That is to say he was more than a little put out that things were not going according to our plan – we were sleeping in hotels, I was needing the bathroom more often than every 350

miles, neither of us had a winter coat, and the peanut butter was creamy and not crunchy. The thrill of our adventure was not shaping up to be as fun and exciting as Will (or I) might have hoped.

The inns were full and had no room for two weary travelers on a cold, snowy night. More than a foot had already fallen, and it was still coming down. So back down the mountain we went, in the dark, in the heavy snow, on increasingly slick roads that the snow plows were barely keeping up with, in search of a place to sleep.

We were exhausted. And we were getting weary of two full days of togetherness. We had to backtrack quite a way before we found a hotel with a vacancy. Which meant having to get up that much earlier the next morning to go back up the mountain in the dark, on possibly icy roads, to get to the rim in time for the Easter sunrise service.

Jesus's baptism was a "yes!" to his vocation as messenger, healer, savior ... and beloved child of God. It marked his holy transition to intentional relationship with God and God's beloved community. Our baptismal "yes" is also to a vocation as beloved children of God, as incarnate messengers of love, as a healing presence to those who are hurting, hungry, blind, imprisoned, and oppressed (be it by fear, social stigma, mental illness, or whatever it is that holds us back from embracing the wholeness that God offers to us). It is a vocation to be conformed to God's vision for us in new and wondrous ways.

When we woke up the next morning, the sun was already shining and the skies were a brilliant blue. We'd overslept and missed the sunrise service altogether. But we were committed to our plan. Rather than going over the river and through the woods to Grandma's house for a formal Easter dinner, we drove back up the mountain, following the snow plow and communing with peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and cans of Shasta.

There were several feet of snow on the ground up there at the South Rim Visitor's Center, and visibility was zero. Despite being mid-morning, the fog

refused to lift. We stood on the very edge of the canyon, and couldn't see anything but white. Two very long days, two thousand very long miles, unplanned hotel costs and we didn't get to see the Grand Canyon.

I've preached a few times before about how my brother was a missionary of sorts to me: he was the first person to invite me to church with him without being condescending or judgmental; he explained who Jesus was and why church was important to him. He was the one who modeled Christianity for me, who let me ask questions and wrestle with ideas that my church-going friends considered blasphemous. He was the one who encouraged me to pray, who helped me understand that it's possible to follow Jesus and also wrestle with doubts and ask big questions.

My brother has also taught me what it means to be in an intentional relationship, part of a community bound by shared values. Our road trip to the Grand Canyon is one example of this. The whole experience of our journey together (including the sandwiches and soda) is representative of my own journey with Christ. There are lots of unexpected plot twists and detours and I have lessons to learn that I seem to figure out only by doing it the hard way. The life of faith in community is messy ~ it's not perfect, we often get in our own way, and more times than not, we forget to practice what we preach. Yet we are also part of a divine mystery, having pledged to seek and serve the Christ in others not to serve our own purposes, but rather those of God.

John had his own concept of his role in the relationship he had with Jesus. He had a plan of how things ought to unfold. He was shocked at Jesus' suggestion that he baptize Jesus rather than the other way around. And it took some convincing before John consented to do as Jesus asked of him. It was different from what he understood the plan to be. But God had other ideas, and events unfolded in an unexpected way.

Since we weren't going to be spending the day hiking the canyon, and as neither of us were feeling very Eastery at this point, he suggested we to go off-plan (on purpose this time) and head up to the Four Corners Monument and begin making our way back home a bit early. We got to the monument

mid-afternoon. The temperature was in the upper 20s and it was extremely windy. We spent just a few minutes enduring the bitter cold and being silly as we jumped around from one state to another before hopping back in the car ... which was when I noticed I was missing an earring. My husband Hayne and I had been dating for a little while by this point in time, and he'd just given me a pair of earrings for Christmas, and now one was missing. The wind had been whipping my hair around like crazy, and I was convinced that the earring was somewhere between where we were in the car and the monument 30 feet away. So back out into the windy cold we went, on our hands and knees looking for a pearl earring in the white pea gravel that served as the walking path between the parking area and the monument.

(Have I mentioned yet that my brother isn't feeling particularly happy with me or this trip by this point?)

He faithfully helped me look for it, despite the wind and cold. Despite the gravel biting his knees through his thin hiking pants.

It only took about 20 minutes before we found it.

And like my brother, faithfully crawling around on his knees helping me find my earring, we who follow Jesus fall again and again to our knees, praying for those in need, that they find those things of everlasting value that their souls are looking for, and doing what we can to help them find it. That's more or less the job description of the baptized: pray and do.

The vows we make at baptism mean we are to reflect on where and when God has shown up and how. We promise to learn the lessons, tell the Story, and participate in Sacramental worship. We promise to continuously orient ourselves toward God, open to God's direction.

We also promise to take the time to be a companion on unexpected journeys. It means being available to and present for whatever unfolds along the way. It means compromise, being willing to yield to and respect the needs of others; it means meaningfully engaging in the community through ministry; it means recognizing that everyone is your equal.

Someday, I'll finally see the Grand Canyon. But it's okay that all we saw was snow and fog and the inside of my Honda for five solid days. Because what I remember most about that trip is that it marked the point in time when the childhood canyon of our big brother / little sister dynamic was smoothed over by an Easter blizzard. Bound together by a common purpose, baptized by snow and communing on sandwiches and soda, we entered into a new relationship that we have carried into our adult lives. The chasm between being family and being friends became properly blurred.

As it was for Jesus and John the Baptist. As it will be for all of us and Anna. We have already welcomed her/you with lemonade and cookies, labyrinth walks and deep theological discussions. But now through the sacrament of baptism, we joyfully welcome her/you as our sister in Christ.

Later this morning/In a moment, we will be presenting Anna Voss for baptism. Her journey with God thus far has not been easy and hasn't gone according to plan. Yet she has consistently chosen to show up, navigate tricky spiritual terrain, and remain open to where God is leading her. She has made this decision to join the Church with a great deal of thought and prayer and consideration, and we are blessed to get to be a part of her support team as she lives in to her baptismal vows. We get to hold her up in prayer, to pray for her on those days when she finds she cannot pray for herself, to encourage her, to celebrate with her, to mourn with her, to discover together with her how God is working in and through our common life and ministry.