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Church of St. Benedict
January 13, 2008, The Baptism of our Lord
Matthew 3:13-17

One of the things I loved about growing up in Hyde Park Union Church, on the South Side of Chicago, was our building.

We had this huge church building – four stories plus a basement.

And we used to run around and explore it, and try to get lost in it.

It wasn't quite that big, but it felt like this great big home to me, a great, big, mysterious home.

In so many ways, that building was a stamp on my childhood understanding of what church was!

The building was big, mysterious, and welcoming for children, and that's how church and Christianity felt to me, too.

I've heard priests say about church communities:

"The building always wins!"

They mean that the kind of community we want to be, the kind of worship we want to have, the kind of understanding of Christian life we have, perhaps, is shaped by the building that houses our church.

People have talked a lot about the buildings that St. Benedict's has had, too.

Originally, our church was housed in two geodesic domes,

that the people of Bolingbrook had all kinds of crazy nicknames for.

When the domes had to be torn down,

St. Benedict's worshipped in a storefront over on Boughton Road.

Then, the church moved into this building in 2003.

All of these buildings have shaped the identity and discipleship of St. Benedict's.

But of course, a church is not primarily a building.

I think that our liturgy – its words and rituals – is also like a building we live in.

Just as we come and walk through the same doors and sit in the same room, we say or hear many of the same words every Sunday, we eat and drink the same bread and wine.

Those words and actions can be very powerful experiences, or they can just quietly flow over us each week.

But they shape us – our minds, hearts, and spirits – even when we might not think we're paying much attention to them.

The Eucharist is like that, and so is baptism, and even wedding and funerals.

They are rituals of life that keep us rooted and connected just by participating in them.

They all make up a kind of spiritual building that we live in.

In both the baptismal covenant and in the Nicene Creed, we declare that "We believe" in a series of things,

and in the baptismal covenant we also say that
“We will” DO a series of things.

Believing and doing are more related than we might think at first.

In Greek, the word for “I believe” is “credo,” and the roots of that word mean: “I set my heart” or “I give myself to.”

When we say “I believe,” we are saying:

this is what I value, this is what is important to me.

For me, it has always meant: this is what I am seeking to understand, and this is the history and story of the community that I am a part of.

There are many things outside of church that declare who we are,
there are many other “buildings” that we live in, that shape who we are and
declare something about who we are.

The Illinois presidential primary is on February 5, and when we vote for a certain
candidate,

we are saying: I believe in this candidate and his or her values.

There are many things in our lives that declare something about who we are, that
create the buildings that we live in:

the tv shows we watch, the magazines we read,

the charities we support,

the friends we spend time with,

the responsibilities we choose,

the ways we let other people treat us.

These are things that shape our lives, that say something about our values,

We might take a close look at the things in our lives that we allow to shape who
we are, and think about whether that is really the person we want to be.

---the person God has created us to be, and calls us to be.

Maybe some of us need to relax more, like Jesus taking time away from the
crowds in the desert or on the Sea of Galilee.

to be less anxious,

step back and believe that God will take care of us.

Maybe some of us need to work harder, like Jesus calling the sick and lame to
stand up and walk, to see that their own faith can make them whole,

to be more responsible for our own lives and struggles,

and find the help that we need, with God’s grace, and not give up on ourselves.

Maybe some of us need to stand up for ourselves more, like Jesus defending
himself before the Pharisees or Pontius Pilate,

to not let others tell us that we don’t matter,

and trust that God will stand alongside us if we stand for justice.

Becoming a Christian is not something you do once,
it’s something that you constantly discover in yourself:

in reading the Bible, in living in the world, in worshipping with your church, in the struggles and joys of your relationships with the members of your family, in living your daily life.

All those things can change us, every day.

Living in the building of Christian discipleship and community is like living in a building that's constantly being remodeled!

Baptism is your move-in date to that building of Christian life.

It's the mark of the beginning of a life in Christ.

When we renew our baptismal covenant, which we are doing today to celebrate the feast of the baptism of Jesus,

we are looking around at that building once again.

We are declaring that this is the building we are interested in living in, this is the building we are exploring and living into.

We are not reading aloud a legal document;

we are reminding ourselves of the invitation God makes to us, that we are invited to live in Christ.

I invite you to turn the page, to page 8 (p. 304 in the Prayer Book), and take a look at the covenant.

In it,

we are invited to believe that God is with us,

We are invited to believe that, through our Lord Jesus Christ,

God is with us in suffering,

God is with us in death,

God is with us as we move from death to life,

in the physical death that will claim us one day,

and in all the little deaths we must go through every day of our lives.

We are invited to believe that through the Holy Spirit, God is with us in the Church,

that God is with us in all people,

that God is with us and forgives us when we mess up or fail or hurt other people,

that God is with us in our bodies, even after death,

that God is with us throughout eternity.

This is a building you could spend your whole life exploring, running around and playing hide-and-seek,

and you'd still never see every corner of it.

This is a building that has foundations generations deep,

we stand on the shoulders of Christians going back through time.

In this building, we are invited, not only to believe, but to set our hearts by DOING things.

We are reminded what it means to be Christians,

And for all the vastness of the building of Christian life,

many things about it are very simple, in the baptismal covenant:

teaching and fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer

resisting evil, being aware of our sin – our own inability to always be loving people – and turning to God in our weakness

looking for Christ in all people, loving our neighbors as ourselves, seeking justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being.

And we aren't even asked to do promise to do these things perfectly. We say, **I will, with God's help.**

These are not particularly special things, that only Christians do.

This is not a special club or a magical list that will fix everything in our lives. It is a way of life, it is a way to walk with God that many other people have walked.

It is a way to set our hearts

The baptismal covenant is a part of the building that is the Christian life.

Whether you know that it is where you live,

or whether you are still just exploring it, it is a building

that can both challenge us and shelter us,

that can draw us to the love of Jesus Christ,

and teach us to walk in his ways.

Amen.