

EPIPHANY III/ BOUCHER BAPTISM

And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Mark 1:17

In a few moments we will welcome Andrew Miller Boucher into the Body of Christ, and what a joy and a blessing that will be, as always. But what does it mean to be a member of the Body of Christ, the community of faith?

After the baptism this morning you will hear from two parishioners something of what being a member of this community of faith, St. John's, means and has meant to them. Right now, I want to say something more general about why we are all here, in words more wise and eloquent than my own. I've been reading an extraordinary book by the anthropologist and psychiatrist Arthur Kleinman, a book called **What Really Matters.**

He writes, ... (R)eligious work remakes the actual practices of ordinary life, forging new synergies between values and emotions, so that individual and collective significance, transcendence, and the sense of ultimate order and control come to animate who we are. It is precisely when an individual, a family, or a community is threatened by catastrophe that people turn to religion for explanation. They seek support for their deepest values, succor for the existential feelings of loss and dread, and revival of hope. Religious rituals, and relationships coreligionists and religious leaders, do just that. They revivify what really matters. Failure and catastrophe empower religion; religion, in turn, empowers people faced with adversity to overcome self-doubt and fear of failing, and to act in the world.

Now, I know that's dense, and if it sounds a bit gloomy, it's because the subtitle of the book expresses its focus: *Living a Moral Life Amid Uncertainty and Danger*. Let me pick out a couple of phrases that seem particularly important.

Individual and collective significance, transcendence, and the sense of ultimate order and control come to animate who we are. Faithful participation in a community of faith enhances our belief in our own significance, connects us with the transcendent, and provides order and stability in an uncertain world.

Religion..., empowers people faced with adversity to overcome self-doubt and fear of failing, and to act in the world. Belonging to a community of faith means, as we will promise in our baptismal ceremony, that Andrew, and all of us, have a cloud of witnesses to support us in our life of faith, to help us grow and develop into the loved and loving people God wants us to be. Every time we celebrate a baptism, we are revived in our understanding of *what really matters*.

After finishing **What Really Matters**, I read an article by Professor Kleinman about his life as caretaker to his wife, who's afflicted with Alzheimer's. He writes, *If the ancient Chinese perception is right that we are not born fully human, but only become so as we cultivate ourselves and our relations with others—and that we must do so in a threatening world where things often go terribly wrong and where what we are able to control is very limited—then caregiving is one of those relationships and practices of self-cultivation that make us, even as we experience our limits and failures, more human. It completes (not*

absolutely, but as a kind of burnishing of what we really are—warts and all) our humanity. And if that Chinese perspective is also right (as I believe it is), when it claims that by building our humanity, we humanise the world, then our own ethical cultivation at the very least fosters that of others and holds the potential, through those relationships, of deepening meaning, beauty, and goodness in our experience of the world.

That's dense too, I know. It merits reading, over and over. But the gist is that it is caregiving that makes us more fully human. And not just the heroic self-sacrifices demands of someone who cares for the gravely ill. For all of us, building and nurturing relationships—all of which require caregiving of one sort or another—our relationships make us fully human. And it's a relationship, indeed, many relationships, into which we welcome Andrew this morning.

Jesus tells his disciples that he will make them fish for people. We come together in the community of faith because God has fished for us. God has sought us out, found us, and brought us home. Just so God has brought Andrew home to us, and we welcome him with full and open hearts.

Alleluia! Amen

