

Year C, January 13, 2019  
1 Epiphany  
Christ Church, Mexia

The Rt. Rev. Wesley Frensdorff was the Bishop of Nevada in the early 1970s, but he wrote a poem in the early '80s entitled *The Dream*. It begins: "Let us dream of a church in which all members know surely and simply God's great love."

The Rev. Suzanne Watson compares it to a metaphor used by Martin Luther in the sixth century: "Can a rock that has been in the sunlight all day not fail to give off warmth and heat at night?" This leads to the question: "Can a Christian who has lived in the sunlight of God's love not fail to give off warmth and love?"

The obvious answer to these questions is no, but "we can't radiate God's love until we've opened our hearts and let it in. We can't expect ourselves or anyone else to simply start loving each other and be nice. We must first live in the sunlight of God's love. We need to bask in the sunlight of God's compassion. We need to absorb God's light, allowing it to replace all those parts that are NOT of God within us – all those past hurts that take up our inner space and block out God's life-giving light. Once we allow God's love in, we can then begin to give off that love. ..."

Over 35 years ago, Bp. Frensdorff dreamed of a church unafraid of change. But is the church any less afraid of change than it was then? It's doubtful. In fact, it may even be more afraid, ... Maybe it is because everything in our world seems to be changing so much and so fast. Therefore, we may be tempted to just keep the church as it was, then it can be a refuge for us in a changing world. It may seem to offer stability, but what does holding on, avoiding change/clinging to the past, do to our spiritual growth or our relevance in the world?

I'm not the same person I was 10-15 years ago, and certainly not the one I was 66 years ago when I was baptized. I'm not even the person I was a few months ago. For one thing, I had no real understanding of baptism or what it really meant when I was younger; after all I was only 11 years old when I was baptized. And the Tradition in which I was baptized didn't really have many guidelines for what it meant – it was that I was simply "accepting Jesus as my Lord and Savior." To me I was essentially fulfilling a required initiation in order to be "one of the members." And I'm not picking on people from that Tradition, but

when I hear people tell me something similar today, I am tempted to ask, what does that mean to you? I suspect that it means different things to different people. That's one of the reasons why I like the Episcopal Church. Our Baptismal Covenant, which we will reaffirm again momentarily, is explicit both in its beliefs and in its expectations for our future life. And implicit in its words is the need for action and the ability to change as our knowledge and understanding change. And so I have changed and my understanding has changed, although the core beliefs and expectations have remained generally the same – like God's love for us, the Trinity, grace, etc.

So, as we reaffirm our vows today, and think of all those who will be baptized into the church today across the world, and as we recall the baptism of our Lord over 2000 years ago, let us dream of a church, and I mean that in a universal sense, that radiates God's love.

Let us dream of a church "that exists beyond its walls, a church that fearlessly speaks out against the unjust structures of society, a church that doesn't always choose the 'safe' route, a church that is flexible enough to be relevant and responsive" in a rapidly changing world. Let us dream of a church "where the members are so (motivated) by their own conversion experiences (and spirituality) that they can't help but to reach out and share the good news, both with people 'like' themselves and with people who are very, very different. Let us dream of a church that is motivated and at the same time so united by its mission that it is able to accommodate differences among its members – a church that can radiate the love of God and help to bring social justice and lasting peace to this world.

Let us dream of a church where we all live according to our Baptismal Covenant – and what that can mean to the world. And it all begins by recognizing, accepting and internalizing God's unconditional and everlasting love for us.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.  
Amen.