

I want to tell you a little bit about the Church of Second Chances and Free Will. Our 6<sup>th</sup> Grade YA class has been creating this church over the course of their year-long class, and this morning they come before us to present their creation, their vision of what Church is all about. And they come to mark an important Rite of Passage: this morning, we affirm them as young people becoming adults in our midst. They are no longer children. They are becoming the Church. They are becoming leaders for the Church and the world.

We sometimes talk about Pentecost, the Feast that we celebrate today – we sometimes talk about Pentecost as being the birthday of the Church Universal, the Church throughout the World, the day when we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit on a group of frightened, disparate, unorganized followers of Jesus and giving them a voice, the ability to proclaim the Good News, as Peter does in today's lesson from the book of Acts – if Pentecost is in some ways the marking of that birthday, 2,000 years ago, it is also, today, the actual birthday of THIS

church: the Church of Second Chances and Free Will. This is the Church they have created. The Church of Second Chances and Free Will is a church in which everyone is welcome, in which no one is judged. It's a church in which everyone has free will, and is encouraged to make their own decisions and have their own ideas. It's a church in which people can have fun, and more than that, a church in which having fun together is part of the mission, part of the Good News they have to proclaim to the world. It's a church that believes that the past is in the past – this is a church about moving forward. It's about the future. It's a place of second chances.

I want to think with you just very briefly this morning about second chances. About what that means. Because it occurs to me there are really three sermons happening this morning – there's this little homily that I'm giving, there's the Liturgy of Youth Affirmation, the Rite of Passage that marks our 6<sup>th</sup> graders as young leaders in our midst, and then we get to Baptism. Which is all about the Church, right? It's the

liturgy when we come back to the very basics of what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be part of the Church that began 2,000 years ago when the Holy Spirit empowered frightened, child-like followers of Jesus to grow up and take on adult responsibilities. And it occurs to me that Baptism is actually all about second chances.

“the heck you say,” right? We’re baptizing two babies, how do they need a second chance? It might be a second chance for Brad, who is choosing to be baptized as an adult, making his own mature decision, after much consideration and thought and discernment and life experience to inform his choice. Baptism may be a second chance for Brad – or, even more deeply, a way of staking his claim on the necessity for second chances, becoming part of a community that is all about second chances. When Brad and I talked about his baptism last week in my office, one of the things we talked about was these promises that we make in Baptism, as part of the Baptismal Covenant, and I won’t read them to you now, because we’ll all hear them in a few moments,

but take note, when we get there, of what we are affirming, what we're promising : to resist evil, to proclaim Good News by word and example, to love our neighbor as ourself, to respect the dignity of every single human being – that's a tall order! And our response is really the response of those who know what it means to need a second chance.

We say I will, with God's help. Because without God's help, we're kinda sunk. Without the grace of a God who is all about second chances, without that help, without that grace, we're dead in the water. We say "I will with God's help" because we know that being baptized means you get a second chance.

So baptism is all about second chances, for those of us who are choosing this path, claiming this path as our own. And in a different way, the baptisms of Cade and Trinity, the two very young people who will be baptized along with Brad this morning – in a different way, their baptisms are also all about second chances. Except this time we're not offering Cade and Trinity a second chance – they're just babies, they

haven't had much of a first chance yet. Cade and Trinity don't need a second chance – but we do. The Church does. Cade and Trinity are a second chance for the Church. For all the kids that the Church has failed, for all the people who have grown up in Christian Churches that hurt them and their families, all the Churches who taught their children untenable things about their neighbors and about themselves.

Churches that taught their kids to be ashamed. For all the times the Church has failed to live up to the promises we make in our Baptismal Covenant – Cade and Trinity, and what they represent – that's our second chance. Our kids are our second chances. Which is not an excuse to put pressure on them to do the things we wish we'd done.

They will make their own mistakes, they'll need their own second chances. When we pray over the parents of our 6<sup>th</sup> graders, we pray: Strengthen them, O God, as they comfort their daughters and sons, remembering that they can neither walk their journey for them, nor shield them from pain.

We get to see the whole life cycle, this morning – the infants, being brought to the baptismal font, and the 6<sup>th</sup> graders on the cusp of young adulthood, beginning to move beyond the circle of their family and into a larger world. The adults, coming forward out of free will, choosing this path and this community as the place where they can find and be found by God. And they're the Church's second chance. If the first Pentecost, 2,000 years ago, was the Church's first chance, we're here two millennia later, ready – desperate, I would say – for a second chance. These people who will come forward today – they are our second chance. Which is to say, they're the promise of our future, the audacious physical evidence of the fact that despite everything we've done to mess the world up beyond repair, God is not finished with us yet.

So I invite you to pay close attention to the next two sermons, to the Church of Second Chances and Free Will, who have something incredible to teach us about what it means to grow up, and to the

baptisms of Cade and Trinity and Brad, each in their own way a physical manifestation of what it means to serve a God who is all about second chances – in individual lives, in families who have experienced great pain, second chance for in the Church around the world and throughout time, the Church Universal, that wonderful and sacred mystery; and the second chance – the third chance, the fourth chance, the billionth chance - for our world, God's beloved world, the world in which resurrection – the ultimate second chance – the world in which Resurrection happens all around us, every day, in amazing and wonderful ways.

I would like the members of the Church of Second Chances and Free Will, along with their parents and mentors, to come join me on the platform, because we're ready for what you would teach us.