

Regional Confirmation Sermon – April 6, 2008 – The Right Reverend Dan Edwards

Our God gives us everything.

God speaks and there is light, then an ocean, then land, and a sky.

God speaks the world into being, and gives us life.

God gave us the universe billions of years ago at the Big Bang.

And God gives us the universe, every day over and over and over.

God loves this creation, this place, this time.

God loves us.

God's love is a free gift.

And out of that gift everything else is born.

In Baptism we receive the sign of God's free gift.

We get to decide many things for ourselves, but we do not get to decide whether God loves us.

We do not get to decide whether God accepts us.

We do not get to decide whether or not we will allow God to forgive us.

Some things are just given to us – not even take it or leave it -- just take it.

The sun rises in the East. It sets in the West.

We do not get to vote.

God loves, accepts, and forgives us.

We do not get to vote.

Baptism is the sacrament of that free gift.

But some things cannot be given.

Some things God must leave to us.

God gives us life and love and hope and joy, but we get to decide what to do with the gifts.

We decide whether to say thank you or not.

We decide whether to love God back or not.

We decide whether to share the gifts we have received with our brothers and sisters or keep them for ourselves.

We decide whether to praise God for the beauty of the earth, or shrug our shoulders and ignore it.

God has given us the ability to become great souls.

He has given us the ability to be strong people of peace and justice.

He has given us the ability to grow in courage and compassion.

But he has only given us the ability.

God does not force us to use it.

We may choose to live for ourselves alone.

Or we may choose to live for ourselves and for a handful of people close to us.

Or we may choose to give ourselves back to God.

We may decide to be people of truth or people of lies.

We may live bravely or make our decisions based on fear.

We may choose to know God or ignore God, to be kind or to be cruel.

Each decision we makes shapes our souls.

We become what we become through our decisions.

We do not become one way or another because of what someone does to us or for us.

We become what we become because of how we respond.

As the comedian, W. C. Fields, once said, "It isn't what they call you that matters. It's what you answer to."

We decide who we will become.

God invites us to become godly.

God invites us to be free and creative, loving and generous, just and merciful.

He invites us to become like the saints

like the Blessed Virgin Mary,

like San Juan de la Cruz, and humble Juan Diego.

He invites us to be like the heroes of justice: Dorothy Day, Harriette Tubman,

Martin Luther King, Jr., Caesar Chavez, Archbishop Oscar Romero, and in our time, Desmond Tutu.

We can become like these heroes only by giving ourselves away.

God gives us our lives.

If we want to be godly, we give our lives back to God.

We do not do that by dying.

We give our lives to God by living in God's way.

We do not have to live God's way to get him to love us.

We do not have to live God's way to stay out of trouble.

We live God's way so we can become our true selves, so we can become fully alive and walk in the light of truth.

In Baptism we receive God's free gift.

In Confirmation, we give ourselves back to God.

We give ourselves back by taking vows.

We promise to continue in the fellowship.

That means staying with each other in good times and bad, right or wrong, whether we agree or disagree.

We promise to study God's word and share God's sacraments.

And we promise to work for peace.

That takes courage especially in a time of war.

We promise to respect the dignity of every human being, absolutely every human being.

We respect the poor, the powerless, the outcast, the prisoners, those the world holds in contempt – everyone: because they are all God's children, all created in God's image, all beloved of God so we cannot despise them.

We promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

These are not small promises.

We are not just promising to be nice and floss our teeth.

These are promises we cannot keep without courage, without strength, without soul power

– the soul power of spiritual lions.

And God knows this.

God knows we cannot keep the promises with make unless God adds something to the gifts he has already given us.

God gives us soul power.

In confirmation we give ourselves to God, and receive from God the soul power to keep giving ourselves.

God gives us courage, gives us faith, and gives us strength to do more than we could ask or imagine.

God gives us the power to become godly.

It is a beautiful thing to see human beings come into their own, to see them grow up, to see them become more than they were by giving themselves to God.

It is a beautiful thing to see their gifts honored by God, received by God and clothed in his strength.

All of us who witness this sacrament are blessed to be here and recall that all of us are invited to share in these vows, to walk in this way of life.

Amen.