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From a Rural Pulpit

Holy Baptism

Leslie J Francis

This study offers an example of ‘standing theology’, as distinguished from sitting theology and kneeling theology. The occasion uses the baptism of Sian and Aled at St Edwen’s Church, Llanedwen, Anglesey, one Sunday in 2017. The Gospel was Matthew 28: 16-20. The study employs the SIFT method of biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching.

Keywords: standing theology, preaching, rural, baptism, SIFT

Today is an important day for Llanedwen Church. It is important because Sian and Aled have come seeking baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It is important because we, representing the People of God in this place, have assembled to witness Sian and Aled’s confession of faith, to ensure the sacramental presence of water, and to pledge our support for their on going Christian pilgrimage.

Before leading Sian and Aled to the font, reflect seriously on what is taking place. Draw on all your psychological functions (sensing, intuition, feeling, and thinking) to guide that reflection.

Jesus said, ‘Go and baptise’. Use your sensing function and savour the sacramental symbolism. See the water, look closely at the water, and let the water wash over you. Come with me to the ancient city of Jerusalem, feel the hot sun, see the parched land, and spot the

one prosperous courtyard where the water sprinkler has been at work. There the grass is green. The water has brought it to life.

See the water, look closely at the water, and let the water wash over you. Come with me to the post-industrial city, see the buildings encrusted with smoke and grime, and spot the one prosperous façade where the water jets have been at work. There is stone cladding as bright as new. The water has cleansed it.

Now come to the font and see the water that cleanses and brings new life to Sian and Aled.

Jesus said, 'Go and baptise'. Use your intuitive function and go in search of the sacramental significance. Focus your attention on one candle in this candle-lit church, on any candle. Let that candle take you back in time. Sense yourself sitting in the light of the candle alongside the people who sat here in 1662 when our liturgy was brand new. Sense yourself sitting in the light of that candle alongside the people who listened to Jesus in the upper room. That candle links us with the People of God throughout the ages.

Focus your attention on one candle, on one specific candle, on the Paschal candle standing by the font. Let that candle take you back in time. Sense yourself standing in this church on Easter Sunday when that candle is lighted anew to proclaim the resurrection Light of Christ. Sense yourself standing alongside all those who have received the Light of Christ by that font throughout the ages.

Now come to the font and see the Light of Christ waiting to be passed to Sian and Aled.

Jesus said, 'Go and baptise'. Use your feeling function and explore the relationships that flourish here today. Here is a church that is full of relationships. Sian and Aled have not come here alone. They have brought with them Jane and Philip (their mum and dad), Sarah

and Stephen (their godparents), and many of their friends and relations. Sian and Aled are not here alone.

Here is a church that is full of relationships. Aled and Sian have come to meet new people, to make new friends. They have come to be part of the wider family of Christ's Church. Here they meet Leslie (the priest), Eileen (the organist), Janet (the lesson reader), David (the churchwarden), and Dorothy, Nora, and Mary (who have lighted the candles). Sian and Aled are not here alone. They are surrounded by people who are proud of their Christian names, names proclaimed in their baptism at the font.

Now come to the font and hear the names of Sian and Aled spoken aloud in the presence of Christ.

Jesus said 'Go and baptise'. Use your thinking function and ponder on what is happening here today. What is the significance of baptism? Think about the sacramental significance of the water. Here is an outward sign of God's spiritual and inward grace. Think about the symbolic significance of the candle. Here is an outward expression of the Light of Christ shining among the people of God. Think about the Christian name proclaimed at the font. Here is the affirmation that Sian and Aled are known to Christ by their names and called by their names to follow him.

Think about the personal questions addressed in the baptism service: Do you turn to Christ? Think about the personal affirmation of faith proclaimed in the baptism service: I believe and trust in Him. Think about the personal promises made in the baptism service: to nurture Sian and Aled in the faith of Christ and to shape them to seek confirmation of their baptismal vows later in life. Think about the gift of baptism: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. There is a lot of theology in today's simple service.

Now come to the font and witness that theology performed in the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Notes on contributor

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