

St Luke's in the City
7th Sunday after Pentecost
15 July 2007
Celebrating at the Crossroads

Dear Friends,

One of the great accomplishments of the ecumenical and liturgical movements of the 20th century was the restoration of baptism to the place of centrality in the life and liturgy of the church. When I was commissioned at St Luke's one of the processions in the liturgy was to the Font. Some of you said to me: "We bring you this water. Be among us to baptise as Christ commanded." Pouring water into the Font (which had previously been dry, covered up and somewhat crowded out by a typically Anglican excess of furniture) I declared: "I receive this water. I shall baptise those who come to be made members of Christ's Church. And I ask you, brothers and sisters in Christ, will you share with those who are baptised what we ourselves have received?" To which you gladly affirmed: "We will share our delight in prayer, our love for the word of God, the desire to follow the way of Christ." Some of you will have noticed that ever since that night the Font has always been filled – except, of course, during Lent – and we have gathered communally at the Font not only for baptisms but also at the Easter Vigil, the feast of the Baptism of our Lord and on the day of Pentecost. You will also have noticed that the place of the Font has been honoured, by un-cluttering, with illumination and back-cloth, with flowers. And some of you know that I would very much like to create a pool of water around the Font, large enough to step into, and for the waters of the Font to continually flow. And in my pipe dreams the Font would be more obviously at the entrance to the church, rather than tucked into a corner. I can claim no credit for all these ideas. In the best of liturgical renewal idiosyncrasy is minimised so that the developments express the church universal. Much of what has happened inside Anglican church buildings since the 1960s has been influenced by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which in turn stands on the efforts of scholars and liturgists who worked across the old denominational divides for a renewed and revitalised faithfulness to the tradition. Baptism belongs to the whole church. As Sacrament, Baptism plunges us into the Christian tradition. Baptism is the sacramental trace of the dying and rising which will require a lifetime of faithfulness to complete. Regardless whether we spoke the words of affirmation ourselves or whether they were spoken on our behalf, none of us fully understands what it means to be baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ in that singular sacramental moment.

There is one issue which I take with the exchange of dialogue between us at the Font at my commissioning. It conveys the distinct impression that I alone baptise, that it is me as priest who does the baptising. This makes as much sense as saying that I alone make eucharist. The priest is called to stand in a particular place within the community in relation to the Sacraments, but it is always the case that it is the community which makes Eucharist together. Just so, it is the community which baptises. Let us pray for our calling together to be the baptised baptising community.

With my love,
David