

This is for Ted. It's something quite unusual in these days of e-mails and text-messages: it's a letter! You remember - pen, paper, writing. But this will be no envelope or stamp, because this is a letter I'm not going to post, I'm going to read it out loud - in place of the sermon, you'll be pleased to know!

Dear Ted,

What a great day in your little life! You've been baptised! Cause for real celebration! Not that, for the moment, you understand all the fuss that's being made of you today. Indeed, a lot of grown-ups might not understand it either.

There is the story of the woman who arrived on the doorstep of the local vicar, handed him his baby, and demanded, "Could you have him done, please, vicar, while I do some shopping?" Not to worry though, Ted. Your parents know better, and the people here at St Georges know better, and one day, we hope, you will know better too. A famous French philosopher named Rene Descartes once said, "*Cogito, ergo sum* - I think, therefore I am." Our consumer society has changed that to *Tesco, ergo sum* - I am because I shop.

But Christians know that we *are*, not because we think, and certainly not because we shop, but because God made us and loves us. We *are* because we *belong*, belong to God. That's what your baptism proclaims, Ted - that you are not an idea that can be thought, or a commodity that can be bought, you are a child of the family of Jesus and a member of his family the church.

In the olden days at a baby's baptism, his grandmother often gave him what's called a "christening mug". It was a mug you couldn't use until you were big enough to sit at the table with your parents. But the day would come, and the child would then ask his mum and dad where the mug came from. And they would tell him that Grandma gave it to him, as a sign of his love for him. And the child would think, "Grandma loved me from the time I was born" And that is so, from the time he was born, and *before* the time he was born.

Have you "done" while your mother is out there shopping, Never! Have you christened, have you *baptised*, and only on a Sunday morning, while we're *all* here in church *worshipping*, celebrating what we've been freely given in Jesus, what can't be merited, earned, or bought - or ever taken away.

But it's true, Ted, that the world will do its darndest to reduce you to an economic unit, giving you a pricetag, but valuing you only insofar as you are productive. And, ironically, even as grown-ups are becoming more and more infantile in their habits, they will try to steal your childhood from you and turn you into an adult before your time. They will try to work you to death. What a way to live! And if you object, if you refuse to conform, if you dare to suggest that life is more than business or fashion or celebrity, no, they won't attack you, they'll simply ignore you. Which is why I'd be lying, Ted, if I told you that being a Christian is going to be easy. Indeed, it's going to get harder and harder to swim against the stream. But Jesus did not call us to be self-centred yes-people, our vocation is to have a firm but inquiring faith, questioning ourselves and the status quo, exposing self-deceit and public delusion, begging to differ with the virtual reality of the politics of spin, and the horrible reality of poverty, war, and terror. Every day of your life you will have to sort through the various options of identity on offer - money, power, fame - and to claim and re-claim your identity as a follower of the man from Nazareth, who fit no formula and lived not for himself but totally and transparently for others, Ted, to stand up and say "No!" to the superficiality, the mendacity, the violence of the world, Oh Ted those are big words but your mother will explain them to you when you are older, she will be good at that she's a teacher. She and your dad will help you to explore the depths of life, to speak the truth and to walk the path of peace.

Of course, Ted, your mum and dad will have a crucial part to play in nurturing your Christian faith, and no small part of this nurturing will be to encourage you to be your own unique self, and to help you to discover and develop your own special God-given gifts. And it will be tough for them, so do be patient with them. They will have to wrestle with the dilemma of protection and freedom. Too little protection too soon will expose you to danger, while too much protection too long will stifle your initiative, independence, and self-confidence. It will be like teaching you to swim: they won't want to throw you in at the deep end, but one day they will have to let you out of the padding pool.

So do be patient with your elders - but also don't be afraid to pester them. Challenge our answers with your questions, our laziness with your energy, our cynicism with your idealism, our hypocrisy with your candour, and our fears with your resolve. A writer named George Bernard Shaw once said that "It's all the young can do for the old, to shock them and keep them up to date." To which I say, "Amen!", for turning people inside-out and upside-down is the will of God. And Jesus himself said, not that children must grow up, but that adults must grow down, and re-discover the child within them.

So be tough-minded, but be careful not to become hard-hearted. And perhaps most important of all, make sure you keep your sense of humour and laugh a lot, lest you take yourself too seriously and become an old sourpuss! Your baptism proclaims your redemption - so act redeemed, and look redeemed too. Let your face express what your heart knows - and so bear your witness.

I hope that all your family and friends enjoying 'wetting your head' in a short while. Today is a celebration, but in church we will shortly have another celebration we will be celebrating the communion where everyone here is invited to share in the bread and wine and we celebrating Jesus and his disciples sharing a last supper before Jesus was betrayed and arrested and then hung on a cross. yes, I agree that doesn't seem much to celebrate there

but we are celebrating that Jesus was with friends and they were a different lot. Quite diverse but for all that they came together and appreciated each other and did some startling things, yes it appeared as if it was lost when he was executed, but when he appeared on Easter day it was a celebration of good defeating evil. a new beginning, a new rising.

I have tried to explain what we do is baptism, it's a mystery, and what we do in communion is also a mystery. We may not all together understand it, but we believe that our life is one of ever increasing understanding.

Baptism and Communion are sacraments - holy occasions, special occasion, but all of life is holy and a special gift and precious gift and we are reminding ourselves of that today. We dedicate ourselves to giving the best of life to everyone, even, no especially those who seem somewhat different to us

I think that's enough for now. preachers can go on a bit - even when they're reading a letter! perhaps we can talk again someday until then, I remain the minister who splashed some water on you had the privilege of baptising you on behalf of the world wide community of followers of Jesus Christ.

Love

Ron