

Renewal of Vows 2022
 April 12, 2022
We Wish to See Jesus: Together
 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Eternal One: Help us, Hold us, Heal us, in your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

Good Morning/ Good Evening.

It's a hard time in the world, don't you think? A stunningly hard time. I don't even need to list the issues. I can pause right now and you can fill them in: _____.
 And yet and still, we gather here, today. Together.

Interestingly enough, *Religious News Service* reports that over the last few years there has been a profound rise in Italy of the number of people who wish to be "*de-baptized*." De-baptized... which in Italy amounts to adults who were baptized as children, who no longer believe in Jesus or God or practically speaking, the teachings of the Roman Catholic church who then renounce the promises that were made for them as infants. They fill out a form available online, citing why they no longer believe, and ask to be released from their baptismal promises. The form is then filed with the local bishop and eventually a note is made in the parish register where the person's baptism has been recorded, stating that they have abandoned their faith.

Of course, church officials, do not use the word "de-baptize" saying what we know to be true. You cannot unbaptize someone. The event has taken place, that fact remains. But what an adult can now do, is use this process to publicly leave the church. After the form is received the individual is recognized as formally relinquishing their faith and their connection to the church. An event, a sacrament was given to them, a potential pathway for their life was offered them and for many, varied reasons, as an adult the individual chooses to visibly distance themselves from this way of being. It is an interesting rite of passage...

Pretty much the opposite of why we have gathered here today. (this evening.)

Welcome friends to what is increasingly becoming a countercultural event. In an insanely fraught time in our world. In a moment in history when an escalation to nuclear war does not seem unthinkable, in a time when more and more people when asked of their faith tradition are replying: none; Or are identifying as spiritual but not religious; In a historic moment when Christianity in this country is heavily identified with a conservative, right-wing political agenda, and mainline protestant Christianity is muted in our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, welcome to this moment. Welcome to this time and this place, this service of worship when we collectively say, "Sir we wish to see Jesus." We, in spite of and because of the world, have

gathered here together today to say, "We wish to see Jesus, we wish to renew our promises, we wish to say again, "I will with God's help follow Jesus and embody his Gospel in our world."

Why in heaven's name? Why do we do this?

Because we need to remember. And because we need to remember together. We need to remember what holds our souls together.

We need to remember how to embody God's call to be in this world.

We need to remember how it feels to respect the dignity of every human being.

We need to remember what it means to continue in the apostle's teachings, the breaking of the bread and the living of those prayers.

We need to remember what it takes to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

We need to remember how to persevere in resisting evil and when we do screw up like you read about it, what it feels like to say, I am so very sorry.

We are here today to re-member, all of this and to do it together.

Christianity has never been a solitary event. We were baptized in a community with witnesses. We were ordained in a community with witnesses. The only way we are ever going to live out our faith is in community, with witnesses, with each other. We make individual promises, we renew our personal vows, but we do it in the midst of each other-together. Even Christ did not make his promises by himself, but rather in a crowd.

We remember today, together, the promises we have made.

Our world is fraught, fragile, frail. Yet here we are together, offering, promising ourselves and our souls to be as Jesus Christ was and is and will be in our world. We are, today, together, audaciously offering to be Christ's hope in our world. There is no way I can do this by myself, or you can do it by yourselves, I'm way too flawed, we are way too flawed, but together, with each other, we can.

People do not get, "de-baptized" together, that rite of passage seems to be solitary, but embracing those baptismal promises, embodying those ordination vows, that work, that sacred embodied prayer, can only happen together.

So here we are, remembering, renewing, together our hope, our longing, to be in this fragile world as Jesus was, may we having undertaken this work offer each other the grace and the courage to carry it out.

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus." May all whom we encounter know all that he is about. Amen.