

Elle and the Cloud of Witnesses
2 Timothy 1:1-7, Luke 13:18-21
Center Church
October 13, 2019
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Today Elle Fortune Reynolds was baptized into the Christian Church as a whole, world-wide, but she was also made part of this congregation, as we promised to love and support her as she grows. Look around you; we are not a large group of people gathered here. We are what's called a "small-membership church." Yet we have decided together that our mission priorities for the foreseeable future will look like this:

"Our core mission is to become a **Center** for spiritual, social, moral and ethical connection and collaboration with people, programs, agencies, faith communities, and neighbors of all kinds in greater Hartford, while developing a vibrant, creative, nurturing, diverse worship life."

A **Center** for spiritual, social, moral and ethical connection....
Wow, when we voted on this last March, I admit had a brief moment of thinking you all had delusions of grandeur! The paint on the ceiling is peeling off. We have trouble getting people to teach Sunday School or be on any ministry team. We are dealing with the need to get our budget sorted out and trimmed. On my worst days, I look at that Mission Priority statement and wonder what we were thinking?

Today is not one of my worst days, however.

Today, I am wrapping myself in Luke's text, imagining into life seeds and yeast. Can you see them? I am seeing this small child and how we have wrapped her in our love and reminded her and her family that she is wrapped in God's love and Spirit power.

Years ago, I used to play a game called Dungeons and Dragons; any players out there? Well, it's a role-playing game. My

character was a halfling, a hobbit, small. But as I played the game, my friends gave my character the motto: "Small in stature, great in Spirit!"

Instead of saying we have "delusions of grandeur" as we think of who we are to be in greater Hartford, here is what I think we need to be saying and embodying: "Small in numbers, great in Spirit."

When Jesus describes how God's realm comes into being, he does not describe great armies bringing it, or crowds of any kind. He says it's like a little seed that grows into a large bush, then listen carefully, he says it is there so the birds can make nests in it. And the yeast that helps make the bread, the basic food of life in his time, makes a loaf that will feed a household, not just the woman who made the bread. We plant for others as well as ourselves.

God's Kingdom, God's realm, God's beloved community, comes into being as, generation after generation (as Paul reminded Timothy), people "rekindle their faith." As people remember they are planting seeds, small ways of changing the earth. As people remember to add yeast, that tiny life that grows flour and salt and sugar into a rich and nourishing loaf. Small things. Big impact.

It's that "Great in Spirit" part of our faith life, our church's understanding of our mission from God, that we rekindle when we baptize anyone. Because we are not about that mission just for ourselves, but for generations to follow us. Yes, the world is a mess. Yes, evil exists. Yes, the church has not fixed all the wrongs around us despite 2000 years of trying.

But yes, we continue to plant seeds, to knead the yeast into the loaf, to baptize a child, believing that, somehow, the Spirit will work in all of that. Our mission commits us to work with God to be Kingdom growers, Beloved Community builders. For us, for her, and for those yet unborn.

The last line of the Timothy reading is a reminder to us and a commission for Elle. "God did not give us a spirit of fear, of timidity, of cowardice, of thinking we are spiritually small. Rather, God gave us a spirit of power, and of love, and of the ability to focus our lives on God's mission." I heard that said in a different way in a song by the group Cloud Cult. "So, if ever I can't see the magic around me, please take my hands off my eyes."

In the ear of every child I baptize, I whisper the words spoken so often by angels in the scriptures. "Don't be afraid." I say it out loud to you. We have discerned what God is calling us to be, and we have now included Elle in that mission. Let us wrap ourselves in power and love and focus! And if you can't see the magic around us today and in the ongoing life of this church, please take your hands off your eyes. Amen.