

# We Baptize You

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Last year, religious circles erupted when a Catholic Priest in Phoenix was forced to resign. No, it wasn't because of anything sexual in nature. Nor was it because of anything financial. The reason he was forced to resign was because for more than two decades, he had been baptizing people using the words, "We baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Lest you didn't catch the problem there, he said, "WE baptize you." He made the audacious and, according to his bosses, unforgivable claim that YOU are part of what we are doing here.

We don't have time to get into it today, but it's mind boggling that THIS is what is worthy of forcing him to resign when so many other behaviors are not, but as I said, we don't have time to get into that today. Now, their rationale for forcing his resignation is that it is Christ who baptizes and the priest is acting on behalf of Christ. However, not only is that not scripturally sound – John baptized Jesus in the Jordan and Jesus sent the disciples out to baptize – it leads us to an unhealthy theology.

## Barbenheimer

To illustrate what the problem is here, I do what I assume all of my colleagues are doing this weekend, and call your attention to Barbenheimer. If you're not familiar, Barbenheimer is a portmanteau, or made up word coined from the combination of words. Think "motel" which comes from combining motor and hotel or "brunch" which comes from combining breakfast and lunch. Barbenheimer combines Barbie and Oppenheimer, the names of two wildly successful and wildly different movies in theaters right now. The Barbie movie uses the toy to dissect and ultimately celebrate feminism, while Oppenheimer is a three-hour biopic about the father of the atomic bomb.

It's so fun to look out at your faces when I preach, because I can literally see some of you thinking, "How in the world is she going to connect Barbie, Oppenheimer, baptism, and the feeding of the 5,000?" It all comes down to that tiny little word, "we."

In a fascinating article on Sojourner's, JR. Forasteros suggests that we find the intersection of the two movies when we consider that central to each is the power of "we." Furthermore, "we" is also what weaves together the two movies, the brilliance of our church's theology, and our Gospel lesson today.

"Both movies invite us to consider what responsibility a creator has for its creations."

(Forasteros)

At one point after World War II, Oppenheimer asks President Harry Truman to help him reign in his creation, the atomic bomb which has begun the global nuclear arms race. Whereas in Barbie, Barbie faces a lunch table of schoolgirls who tell her exactly how the Barbie beauty standards made them feel un-feminine.

"Both films ultimately...focus on the forces that shape a creation's ongoing impact on the larger world. Is Barbie a feminist icon, or does she set unrealistic

beauty standards and hold feminism back? Does the government have a responsibility to maintain the biggest arsenal of nuclear weapons to ensure citizens' safety or does it have a greater responsibility to ensure the safety of its citizens by other means?

I've asked similar questions about Jesus, too. Jesus created the church...In the centuries since, the church has been a source of both liberation and oppression, including conquest, colonization, genocide, white supremacy, bigotry, and sexual abuse. Do we hold Jesus responsible for the myriad evils the church has worked in his name? And what responsibility do the rest of us, who belong to the church, have for actions done in Jesus' name?"

(Forasteros)

Honestly, Forasteros is naming an issue that is central to the decline of the church. People see the oppression and injustice that has been perpetrated in the name of the church, historically and currently, and say they want no part.

### **The Scriptures**

And yet WE'RE here. Somehow, those of us who chose to continue to be part of the church have found a way beyond the injustice. And that brings us back to that tiny little word "we" and our Gospel lesson.

The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is familiar to many churchgoers. In Matthew's version, Jesus has been healing people on the seashore, it's getting to be late in the day, and his disciples suggest that he send the people back into town to find something to eat. That is, the disciples suggest that Jesus turn the people out to rely on their own devices.

But Jesus instead instructs the disciples to keep everyone gathered and that they themselves gather up what they have and feed everyone. So, they gathered what they had, Jesus blessed and broke the bread, and somehow, not only were all fed, there were more leftovers than they had started with.

I was raised thinking that this was an abracadabra miracle. That Jesus waved his hands and said the right spell and somehow, magically, more bread and fish just started popping up out of nowhere.

But friends, the more I study the scriptures, the more I know of human nature and the kingdom of God, I'm now convinced this is a miracle of "we." Sure, there were some who had raced out to the countryside with nothing when they heard that Jesus was healing the sick. But my husband will tell you that there are some people who just cannot leave the house unprepared for every possible scenario. Those people brought not just snacks but meals and beverages and who knows what else, just in case.

And, moved by Jesus and the generosity of those around them, they became generous, too. Individually, I cannot feed a crowd with the goldfish crackers in Josie's diaper bag, but collectively, we're going to be able to find a way that all will be fed. And THAT is a miracle.

Furthermore, tapping into that power of collectivity is one of Jesus' superpowers and it's why church still matters. The ways that God's grace and mercy and justice and compassion can

manifest when we behave collectively are exponentially greater than how they could on behalf of any one of us.

### **Conclusion**

So back to Barbenheimer and baptism. In Barbie, a mother/daughter pair have very different takes on how the doll has influenced the experience of women.

Forasteros notes that:

“what matters isn’t their own analysis, but that both women join forces to use collective action to dismantle patriarchy. That’s right: We save the world by organizing to fight disenfranchisement. Our individual opinions matter less than our collective resistance to unjust systems.”

So, too, as we look to our faith.

Forasteros goes on:

“After all, unlike Oppenheimer or the makers of Barbie, Jesus, rather than standing back with a frown of frustration on his face, made his home among the very peoples oppressed in his name. And we still find Jesus among those who are vulnerable and marginalized. Christians who wish to join Jesus in healing the wounds caused in his name must be there too. We should find ourselves on the frontlines of the fight for trans rights, for Black lives, for Indigenous dignity. Our faith should compel us to disrupt abusive systems and oppose policies that accelerate climate change. Our faith should radicalize us.”

Friends, I’ll be honest – I get so caught up in the moment when we’re celebrating a baptism that I sometimes lapse into saying the formula I was taught, saying “I baptize you,” rather than “we baptize you.” But the intent is always there. We celebrate baptism in the midst of Sunday worship because some of the genius of church is that we are better together. Because I may make barely a dent, but together, with God’s grace, we can change the world. Because our society has created a false god out of individualism and collective accountability is the corresponding virtue that can help to correct that fallacy.

Elle, I know that’s a lot to put on an 11-day-old. John, I know it’s a lot to put on you, too. But that’s why we’re here, together. Today, we celebrate that the two of you are God’s beloved, that the two of you are absolutely magnificent and cherished in the eyes of our maker. And, that if we, the church, harness the power of God’s love for us all, we can, indeed, we will, change the world.

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**Psalm 145:8-21; Matthew 14:13-21**  
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