

## Faith Statement Kirsten Brownsmith

*As part of her process toward baptism on August 2, 2013, Kirsten wrote this statement of faith:*

I started my journey as a Christian about three years ago. In that time, I have been to many services at various churches of different denominations, from Quaker to Catholic. As a non-baptized believer, the question of whether or not to take communion was always in the back of my mind when I would find my seat in a new church and open the order of service. I would flip to the last page and scan the outline for the Eucharist. There, I would often find a short line of text telling me whether or not it would be appropriate for me to partake of the sacrament.

The whole process was kind of amusing, really. In actuality, I could do whatever I wanted. There are no Baptism Detectors that we pass through on our way up to the bread and cup. In fact, in all of the services and communities I have spent time in, no one has ever asked about my baptismal status. What was I actually weighing in these decisions, then? Whether or not I believed in an inclusive Eucharist? Whether or not I believed in baptism?

Because no one ever asked me about my baptism, I have felt no pressure, nor external sense of urgency, to BE baptized. The one exception to this was in the midst of wedding planning, when Hillary and I engaged in a heated debate about whether to specify exclusivity or inclusivity of the Eucharist in our order of service. In the end, Hillary gracefully conceded her position for my preference, but it left me wondering. Though it was not her intention, and her arguments were in no way directed toward or against me, they did exclude me from full participation in that sacrament and separate me from her understanding of whole Christian life.

But, see, it's not that I was actively, passionately Not Baptized, much in the same way that Hillary and I were not actively, passionately Not Married. Hillary's and my engagement was a vital part of our relationship. A process, more than a period of waiting that informed our understanding of love, commitment and compassion. I suppose I was in an engagement process with baptism too.

But how long could this engagement period last before I was just being avoidant? Many traditions have some sort of age of accountability – what was mine? What did it say about me and my faith that I refused to set the date?

Being an Outcast is a blessing in a system that thrives on oppression. We know that God's chosen people are the destitute, those who hunger and thirst for both sustenance and justice. But both privilege and oppression have a lot of layers, and it is rare to find a person who embodies all of one and none of the other.

I live in a mix of the two, like so many of us. Being queer has been a blessing for me, because it has given me the eyes to see and the ears to hear some subtleties of oppression that I may have missed, had I grown up to be a white, able-bodied, conventionally gendered, *straight* woman.

But I live in a time when my people are selling out to the system. Wealthy, white, attractive, gay men and lesbian women are the faces of a Gay Rights Movement, and once their demands for assimilation into our social and political power structure have been accepted, they will happily leave the people of color, the poor, the genderqueer, the homeless, and generally disenfranchised queers behind. Since I live right on that cusp, I have a choice of allegiance. This is my age of accountability. As a Christian, I cannot make the choice to be baptized into a kingdom of worldly power and corruption. So, it seems it is time for me to be baptized into the Kingdom of God.

First, I had to realize that, while I had long stopped romanticizing Community-with-a-capital-C, I was still waiting for The Perfect Community to come sweep me off my feet and love me and challenge me and hold me accountable and be the perfect vision of God's Kingdom. I was still nursing the wounds from other communities I had walked out of or been cast from, and I was ignoring the community that was growing all around me. I was hovering at the door of Circle of Mercy – one foot out and one foot in. Just close enough to criticize all the places it fell short and just far enough away that it couldn't hurt me.

But that didn't stop Circle of Mercy from embracing me. Many times, this community has stepped up to support me and Hillary without our even asking. That kind of care has been humbling. We are all broken. We all fall short of the Glory. But God doesn't call us to be perfect. God calls us to love and support each other through our best and our worst. Circle of Mercy has done that for us, and so it is Circle of Mercy that should baptize me.

Next, I had to articulate what baptism would mean for me. If I believe in an inclusive Eucharist, if I don't believe in baptism as a key to eternal salvation from hell, then what do I believe it is?

I believe that baptism is an allegiance to the Kingdom of God, and I do believe that that allegiance disallows for any alliances with false idols – namely, Institutions of Oppression, The State, and Consumerism. In that way, I am giving my life over to Christ, because that kind of statement does not generally assure safety in our broken world.

I also believe that the God I ally myself with is a living God. One who still speaks to us, calls to us and moves in the world. In committing to this God, I am committing to a lifetime of re-reading and re-hearing scripture, but I am also committing to finding the voice of God in myself and in the modern-day prophets that continue to speak out against oppression, the Jesuses in the headlines.

Lastly, and the part I struggle with most: I believe in the God who works in miracles and, therefore, trust God over my Self (you know, that ego part). This last part brings to mind a verse in Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge [God], and [God] will make your path straight." (Proverbs 3: 5-6)

This was the verse read at Hillary's baptism, and the verse scrawled in the presentation page of the Bible Hillary received from her mother ten years later. If you believe in this sort of personification of God, you might imagine that God laughed as that verse was read for the

passionately faithful five-year-old, who no one suspected would grow up to be the passionately queer Christian she is today. You might also imagine that that same verse went from being ironic to aggressive when it was written as a reminder, a demand even, to have faith in God so that HE will straighten your queer-broken-self out.

Now, that same verse will not leave my mind as I search for verses that inspire me, console me, or challenge me. There are plenty of *other* verses that have done all of those things for me. A passage from 1 Thessalonians is taped to my bathroom mirror. Last year, I wrote a blessing for my midwifery class based on the midwives of Exodus. Our community house in Atlanta was named for the hymn “His Eye is on the Sparrow.”

Yet, this is the verse that I cannot escape from. Perhaps God is trying to restore the verse to its place of irony. Or maybe I really need the constant reminder not to obsess over every tiny decision I have to make – that I cannot actually control *every* aspect of my life, nor should I. After all, I am a child of a God, who works in miracles.