

At the Fox Run Mall the other day, I saw some boys talking. They were comparing jackets. One had Northface and the other was showing off his new one. It's a Carhartt—he said it, pulling at a tag on the side...and I got it at Cabela's!" It seemed it was all about the labels. The labels they had on conveyed status.

Once we're baptized, each of us wears a label, albeit an invisible one: Christian. This label conveys much more than status. It conveys relationship. Relationship with Jesus, God, Spirit, and relationship with others who have been baptized—now all brothers and sisters— in Christ. The label Christian also conveys love, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, help and hope.

At the time of Jesus, Jewish people used water in purification rituals. They'd have to go wash before they could go into the temple. (Kind of like taking a shower before you use the pool. While that may be practical at the Y, this ancient purification ritual was ceremonial. People were away something that somehow made them 'unclean'.)

And John the Baptist, was out in the wilderness, telling people to 'repent'. 'Repent' is a word loaded with implications, but it really just means 'turn away'. Today we'd say, "change your ways." John was giving people the opportunity to washing away a messy past and getting a fresh, clean start.

Then Jesus himself, who had no need to change his ways, goes into the water. He had no ego about it. He didn't say he didn't need it. He humbled himself to be **in relationship with us**. And Scripture tells us that God was pleased. And when we intentionally enter in that holy relationship, I expect God says, "This is my precious child in whom I am well pleased."

Today, when we baptize, we are affirming that this person is a precious child of God and we are welcoming them into Christian relationship, where we follow Jesus and the things he taught.

The invisible Christian label that we wear becomes visible through our actions. Christianity is a way of *perceiving* the world—seeing people as they are and loving them anyway. It's a way of *interacting* with the world that offers help and hope. It's a way of *transforming* the world by extending grace to others.

I'll tell you a quick story. There were two teenagers. One was Christian and the other wasn't. The girl who didn't know Jesus asked her friend what Christianity was like. They agreed to go to the Christian girl's house after school. She gathered an egg, a carrot, and a teabag and put them all in pot of water, then put it on the stove.

After about 10 minutes, the Christian took the items out of the water and said, Christianity transforms us. We go to church to learn about Jesus. The egg was fragile when it went into the water, but it came out strong. Jesus gives us strength for this journey of life. And we're taught to encourage people, especially those who are feeling fragile.

The carrot went into the water firm, but it came out soft and pliable. Jesus has a way of showing us compassion when we're being rigid and unyielding. And when we encounter those who are cranky, mean, and hard hearted, we can show them kindness and soften their hearts.

The teabag went into the water with lots of potential, but it took the water to release it. Those who walk with Jesus live their best lives because all things are possible with God.

In all three of these cases, something was transformed. That's what being in relationship with Jesus does for us." The teenager looked at the items thoughtfully and then asked her friend, "May I come to church with you?" Blessed be and amen.