

Good morning. My name is Ella Ens Funk, and I am the daughter of Susan and James Ens Funk, and Granddaughter of Jake and Barbara Ens, as well as Mary and the late Edd Funk.

I have spent the past two months mulling over what I might say today, and I have found that it is difficult to encapsulate everything that led to this decision into a short reflection. I nevertheless hope the stories I highlight lead to an understanding of what baptism means to me.

In 2017, my brother Colin was baptised. He and I had been going to faith discussions for the past several months with Patrick and our previous co-pastor, Anita Retzlaff. It was determined at the end of those discussions that both Colin and I could be baptised, and he was, but I didn't feel ready. While I could talk about and understand the stories of the Bible, I didn't know what it felt like to believe in God. In many ways, I think being raised in this community meant that my faith was so inherent to me that I didn't notice its presence at all.

I have a journal entry from my first week of University, in September of 2021, where I talk about my nerves about going into a new situation, and how, whenever I am in periods of transition and uncertainty, I turn to hymns. "The Peace of the Earth" is one that has always been meditative and calming for me, and is the song mentioned in this journal entry.

The past two years at University have deeply impacted how I understand myself as a Christian within the context of greater society. I am currently attending Emily Carr University, studying Communication Design. Emily Carr is an arts university, and the majority of the people I met in my first year were atheist. It is through living alongside people without a faith practice, who had no religious understanding or background, that I began to see how my life was different. I grew up in a home that focused on intentionality, where the answer to any question was "what do you think is reasonable?". I found the homes of my peers deeply lacked this sense of thoughtfulness and criticality towards social expectations. I found that my Mennonitism became very visible: I try to be thoughtful about the objects I buy, and the activities I do. My use of language is also a characteristic that stands out. I tend to be exacting with my words in a way that most young adults are not. I have come to realize the value of my faith community by understanding the value of my behaviour. I think being critical about cultural norms, and deciding when to participate in them, is integral to being a follower of Christ. The stories of Jesus show a man who was interested in God's love being accessible to all, and choosing to live critically and intentionally is a way of challenging the current structures of power we live within.

Another factor is understood in a word and simultaneously incomprehensible: love. From the ages of 11 to 17, I was incredibly anxious and experienced some symptoms of depression. During this time, I pushed out most of my feelings, and this included rejecting the love given to me by my family. I started counseling at around 16, but it was in my first year of University that I started to finally begin to feel a full range of emotions again. Feeling loved by my family is still incredibly overwhelming to me, and it is this love that has led me to choose to be baptised. A few months ago I was reading some portions of the new testament, including Jesus' baptism. Matthew 3:17 says "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." In reading this, with my new understanding of the love my parents have for me, I understood more deeply the connection between God and Jesus, as well as God and humans. This image of God as loving, as inherently pleased with her creation, is one that fits with my understanding of what love means.

The last part of my reflection today centers on home. Home has been a difficult theme for me over the past few years. I spent most of my first year of University feeling like I was without a home, thinking that my parent's house could no longer be home since I wasn't living there. I was afraid of the pain of being so far away, and I thought it would be easier if I told myself that the only home I had was within myself. But this is a very painful way to live, and as a result I lived a very self contained life. I felt closed off to others, because I could only feel safe within myself. This summer, I lived in residence at Conrad Grebel in Waterloo. I was living in the same space as Colin, and with a group of many people with similar faith backgrounds and values. It was an absolutely joyful experience. Even in the first month, I felt amazingly at home, more so than I had felt in the previous 8 months in Vancouver. I am beginning to recognize that home is not a single place, and that having activities and places that remind you of your loved ones makes life easier, even when you miss them. Knowing home, and having that exist in places outside of myself, has opened me. I know myself better because I know where I feel safe, where I feel like I belong. The church is one of those places. Hymns make me feel at home. The Mennonite community in Canada makes me feel at home, regardless of the congregation I am in. Having deep connections with those around me makes me feel at home. My commitment to the church is a commitment to contributing to this home, for which I am so grateful.

Baptism matters to me because I want to live intentionally. I want to be loving to those around me in the same steadfast way that I know I am loved. I want to ground myself in the home of the church, regardless of what physical space that may be. Being baptized means that I am publicly committing myself to the pursuit of these values, and a continuous desire to learn and live a life grounded by faith.