

Last weekend, in a twenty-four hour period, I had a baptism, a wedding, and a funeral. In church slang, we call this hatching, matching and dispatching.

For a small church like ours, that's a lot of significant life events in a short time.

In fact, on Saturday morning, as the family of the child to be baptized was leaving the church after a brief rehearsal, the wedding party was arriving to put finishing touches on the parish hall for the reception. And as the members of those two groups were chatting with each other, the funeral party arrived.

These events struck me so much that I even preached about them on Sunday because each of them raised such powerful questions about where God is in our lives, and how we can follow Christ.

What I didn't get to do, however, was meditate on what each of those events means to us in human terms. And believe me, at least two of those events struck me personally.

The funeral was a simple affair. The man we buried had lived a long life and the family did not so grieve as celebrate his joyful and service-filled life. He hadn't lived in this area for decades, so I did not know him.

But I did know the couple to be married and couple whose child would be baptized. I've known them since they were kids. They were in my youth group through high school. It was a strange feeling to see them there, adults raising families of their own, stepping out into futures. The groom is the same age I was when I entered seminary.

So for a long time, I just watched these young folks and marveled at how life moves on. I began to understand at that moment what my parents used to say when my siblings and I began having children: They grow up so fast, but we haven't changed!

It occurred to me at that moment that I don't relate with these "kids" the way I used to. They are no longer youth group kids. They are mature adults making their own decisions. Some of those decisions may not be the ones I would make, but that's what adulthood is all about - making decisions for yourself and letting others make theirs.

Anyway, once I got over the shock of feeling very old and realizing just how long I've been a priest at St. James', I began reflecting on the sacraments which they were about to be part of.

Baptism is the first and foundational sacrament of the church. Matrimony is foundational for many families - "the most important day of my life." Each sets the people involved on a life-long journey that is challenging and exciting, frustrating and rewarding. Each is all about beginning a committed relationship.

And each sacrament requires not only commitment on the part of the baptized and married but on the part of the congregation.

At the wedding that Saturday afternoon, once the bride and groom promised to love, comfort and honor each other, I asked the following question: "Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their marriage?"

At the baptism Sunday morning, I asked the congregation this: "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support this person in her life in Christ?"

These questions make the point that nobody gets through this life alone. Nobody can make it without others who love you, know you, and want the best for you. It's a hard life - and it takes more than a village to learn how to live it well.

I looked at these young adults whom I've known so long and marveled at how they were stepping into the roles that once seemed so far away for them. But I marveled also that they were not stepping into it unsupported. We truly are in this together.

That made me think about the funeral. There is no similar question of the congregation at a funeral. We do not need to support them any longer. We have done all we could for them. They are at rest from their labors and in joy with God.

I don't think I'll have another weekend like this for awhile, but I'm thankful for the chance to ponder birth, death and union all together. When you see these huge life events all at once, you realize how precious the gift is to be on this earth and share its wonders with others.