

Today we have several people ready to declare, that they want to follow Jesus. I love baptismal services.

- Rather than squeeze in a message on the Psalms or shortchange worship, I am going to speak for a few minutes on baptism itself and then we will baptize.
- We will pick up the final Psalm for the summer next Sunday.

When you get people and water together, funny stuff happens. For example,

- Before a prior youth pastor did his first baptism, I overheard his wife say, 'All right, we can go by Rodriguez' and you can practice baptizing me just one more time. But remember this – when you have your first funeral, you are not going to practice burying me.'¹
- Or there was the time a fellow staff pastor baptized a man with a large belly. There must not have been enough water because his belly did not go under. The panicked pastor looked around and then put his knee on the belly.

The word picture is of a complete immersion, a complete death to the old life. Which reminds me of another illustration from history. On December 26th 508 A.D., the Frankish (western Germany) King, Clovis I, was baptized from paganism.

- He was at war on many fronts. Because of the war, when he was baptized, he held his right hand above the water.
- When his army was baptized, they did the same.
- That way he could say, "This hand has never been baptized" and they could swing their battle axes just as freely as ever.'²

Baptism is a turning point.

Baptism's Turning Point.

Ro 6.

For a few minutes, let's explore the word picture of baptism.

- Baptism is more than a symbol; God takes common things and makes them holy.



¹ Holly to Joseph Lear.

² 'Among the Franks, whole armies went into the water with their right hands held high, so that they did not get wet. Then they could say, 'This hand has never been baptized,' and they could swing their battle axes just as freely as ever (Green 565).' See also, Gregory of Tours accounts of Saint Remigius who did the baptism.

- Today we have ordinary water, but the action and intent of the heart makes this a holy action.

1. Turning Point – Repentance, Acts 2:38.

I used to work for a surveyor who laid out roads. Roads vary in elevation and rarely are they straight for long. Frequently, there are points when the road begins to turn; it is called a turning point. We would drive a little pin into the asphalt or stake into the ground so that we could refer to it.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter told the crowd about Jesus' resurrection. They asked, 'What should we do (Acts 2:37 NLT)?' Peter replied, 'Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38 NLT).' Repentance is turning from darkness to light, from self to Christ, it is the most important turning point in our life.

- Change is difficult, but when people encounter Jesus, they change.
- Baptism is like driving that visible little pin. Everyone here is a witness to their turning point, and they can always refer to this moment when their faith was made public.

Peter's sermon had two sides, repentance and baptism.

- Repentance is something we do in our hearts, something intensely private before God.
- Baptism is a public confession of that faith: 'For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (Ro 10:10 NLT).'

The turning point is when we ask for forgiveness by faith, but the construction of a new life in Jesus requires letting others know of your change – walking out the change.

As we identify with Jesus by faith, we have the hope of a new, abundant, and eternal life.

2. Jesus' Baptism.

If you were to trace the history of baptism, you would find the earliest expression was the washing of water to cleanse away ritual uncleanness. They would be sprinkled using a hyssop branch, and then they were to wash their clothes and take a bath. Then they will be ritually clean (Nu 19:19-19).

- This is why David prayed after his sin with Bathsheba, David - 'Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow (Ps 51:7 NIV).'
- Later, when an adult, an outsider, wanted to become a Jew, a full immersion baptism was a part of the ceremony.
- It changed with John the Baptist, his baptism was a confession of repentance, a commitment to change. His baptism showed that they had 'turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven (Mk 1:4 NLT).' After they confessed their sins John would baptize them, v. 5.

'One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and he was baptized by John in the Jordan River.¹⁰ And when Jesus came out of the water, he saw the heavens split open and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on him.¹¹ And a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you (Mk 1:9-11 NLT)."'

Note: Jesus came up out of the water. The verb baptize is to immerse.

Jesus was unique, he did not need to repent. 'Someone is coming soon who is far greater than I am-- so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave.⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:7, 8 NLT)!' Jesus' baptism was identical to the ones today, but it served a different purpose.

Each of the four witnesses adds something to this simple story.

- John connects Jesus to Isaiah's lamb. 'Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29 NLT)!'
- Matthew records Jesus' insistence on baptism because, 'It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15 NIV).'
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that Jesus was immediately led into the wilderness to be tempted. 'The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness,¹³ where he was tempted by Satan for forty days (Mk 1:12-13 NLT).'

Jesus was unique; he was filled with the Spirit from birth. In fact, John did not want to baptize him because he was pure and sinless. There are three reasons ...

- First, it was here at his baptism that Jesus began to identify with our sins; he started to become our substitute. 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2Co 5:21 NIV).'
- Second, as an example for us.
- Third, to receive the Holy Spirit's empowerment. The desert was considered the dwelling place of demons and temptation. Ancient monastics built monasteries in these remote place to do spiritual warfare.

Jesus and his disciples would use the concept of baptism frequently – baptism of fire, baptism of the Holy Spirit. The most thorough explanation comes from Paul in Romans 6.

3. In Christ, Ro 6.

Paul wants the Roman Christians to stop sinning and he uses baptism as an example.

‘Should we keep on sinning ... ²Of course not! ... ³Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? ⁴For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives (Ro 6:1-4 NLT).’

On the one hand, just take in the word picture of Jesus being laid in the tomb, dead. We die and are laid out in death when we were baptized. I have performed a lot of funerals, and I have never seen a corpse standing up or walking around. All of them were laid out horizontally.

- We saw some bodies strapped to the back of motorcycles, but they were on their way to the crematorium.
- I have had people offer me money to hold someone down until the bubble stops. I hope they were joking.

On the other hand, the Paul’s word picture continues with Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. I wonder, did Jesus ...

- Just wake up, as from a sleep?
- Did the power of Holy Spirit put him on his feet?
- God carefully blow life into his nostrils as he did Adam?

Paul’s point about sin is that when we died in baptism, all the old habits and its punishment died with us. We now live new spiritual lives in these old physical bodies. The old spiritual man / woman is dead and buried.

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Let’s continue ...

‘Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. ⁶We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.

⁷For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin (Ro 6:5-7 NLT).’

Paul repeats the idea of dying and resurrection. But here he clarifies what he meant by 'joined with Christ Jesus,' only here it is 'united with him.'

- Throughout Paul's writings he uses terms like, 'in Christ,' or 'with Christ.' Here he is the clearest – 'united with Christ.'
- He uses a rare word (σύνφυτος) that 'means literally 'grown together with ... The process of grafting may be in mind.'³ Like two trees growing together so much their trunks are now one. How?
- By faith – 'For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Ga 3:26 NLT).'

There is a lot of talk about 'our identities' these days. This is different from striving for excellence. Some people believe they can recreate themselves into who they want to be. While this may sound good, it makes them their own god.

- I believe that I can only know myself, and be my truest self, when I am kneeling, transparent before my Creator. Then, I can fulfill God's wonderful purpose of my existence.
- Remember, Satan fell from being a beautiful and powerful angel when he said, 'I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High (Is 14:14 NLT).' He usurped the God's position.
- Paul said that 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23 NIV).' No matter how we may tinker with ourselves, we are not the Creator or sustainer of our lives and fall short of God's plan for us when we usurp God's place.

Our Creator does have a wonderful plan for our lives. But to live out that wonderful life, we must give up our control.

- Jesus said, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Mk 8:34-35 NTL).'
- Paul said it like this, 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God (Ga 2:20 NIV).'

In this last portion, note that we first identify with Jesus' death, not his glory or resurrection.

'And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. ⁹We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. ¹⁰When he died, he died once

³ C.K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1957), p. 123.

to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus (Ro 6:8-11 NLT).'

Paul repeats baptism's similarity to death and resurrection.

But in these verses the emphasis is on living in Christ. Every one of these candidates will come up out of the water (I hope).

- On the one hand, they will go down a dry Christians – because of faith – and come up as wet Christians.
- But on the other hand, God takes common things and makes them holy. They are publicly identifying with Jesus' death and resurrection; it is a holy moment.
- They are saying the power of sin is broken in my life. The old man / woman is dead and buried. You are witnesses, celebrants to the new life.

A couple of the quirky things that the father of Latin Christianity, Tertullian, tried during the early baptismal services ...

- Was dunking the individual three times – Father, Son, Spirit.
- He also gave the candidate a cup of warmed milk and honey, to symbolize the new and wonderful life in Christ.⁴ It is like leaving the desert and going into the Promised Land. Many in this room can tell how their life changed for the better. They now have a new life, a life filled with milk and honey.

Jesus came to give us an abundant life, to reverse death and decay.

Conclusion.

Recently, there have been numerous deaths. This is a great time to remind ourselves that if we believe and yet die – physically - we will never die – spiritually.

'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you (Ro 8:11 NIV).'

⁴ 'When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel. Then when we are taken up (as new-born children), we taste first of all a mixture of milk and honey, and from that day we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week,' Tertullian, 'On Baptism, Apologetic, The Chaplet, or De Coorna,' Chapter III, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers 03, Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, Philip Schaff, ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), p. 94.

These here today are telling us they are uniting themselves to Christ by faith; they are dying with Christ on the cross and being buried; but they are also being raised to new life in Jesus.

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Prayer.