



STAYING WET WITH OUR BAPTISM



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Mark 1: 4-11

The Baptism of Jesus

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The word of the Lord

Oft times, when I watch a movie, theological themes pop into my head. This was the case for a movie entitled, Cast

Away, from the year 2000 that starred Tom Hanks and Helen Hunt. What this movie recalled for me was baptism.

It was a story about a guy named Chuck who pretty much cared about Chuck. Chuck is a guy who lived life on the edge with constant travel as an executive with Federal Express but also lived on the brink of commitment. It is on a particular flight that goes down in the ocean where Chuck finds himself as a 'cast away'. Chuck survives by washing up on a deserted island hoping that someone will come looking, find and rescue him. He spends four years on the island with only Wilson who is an imaginary friend that he makes out of a volleyball that had washed up on the shore. He realizes that he is going to die if he stays on the island where no one will ever even know what truly happened to him. The only thing Chuck has control of is the time when he would end his own life. Staying on the island isn't an option as he realizes that no one will likely ever rescue him. He finally decides that the only way to save himself is through the water. By submitting himself to the sea –Chuck finds life and a life he lived differently as a result.

At the end of the movie Chuck says something profound. He said that all he knew to do when he was on the Island was to "keep breathing while he marked time". I thought at that moment in the movie that I had heard the definition of meaninglessness.

As I watched that movie, I realized that nothing or no person was going to rescue Chuck. For Chuck to find life, he was going to have to submit to a power that was greater

than himself. For Chuck it was the sea, but I was thinking about God and baptism.

Symbolically, in baptism the water stands for our redemption. Through the waters of baptism:

- we follow the example of Christ
- we participate in Christ's death and resurrection
- we understand that we clothe ourselves with Christ which acknowledges our need for Christ and our need for cleansing.
- is the sign of God's reign in our lives where we acknowledge what God has done for us.
- we die to ourselves and rise to a new understanding that we are children of God. We die to our own meaninglessness. We die to ourselves and rise to a new understanding of our value as children of God. We are not 'cast-aways'.

Let's take a moment to look at a bit of history on baptism. Did you know that baptism existed before John and Jesus? The Israelites practiced baptism. They would baptize one another when they celebrated the acceptance into their lives the covenant God had made with them; they also baptized converts to their faith to initiate them into the covenant so that each new convert to the faith had their own Exodus experience which was through the water.

In Jesus' baptism by John, Jesus identified himself fully with us and embraced the mission that God set out before him. God intended that sacraments would be used to tell the story of God's grace. Using common elements such as: water, juice, and bread we encounter God's grace.

For us:

- in the sacraments what we see is the gospel of Jesus Christ preached right before our eyes as the water represents the cleansing of our sin and the new life of faith in Jesus.
- Sacraments seal the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. When you hear of a pastor speaking of sacraments as a sign and a seal, the image of a seal is an old one. In ancient times, in order for a document to be official, it had to have the king's seal on it. Thus, the document carried with it all the king's authority and power. Likewise, as we participate in the sacraments, we receive through these actions the power and authority of God in our lives. The benefits of the gospel are sealed within our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
- Baptism is our entrance into Christ's church. It is the ritual of initiation and welcome.
- We baptize infants as the parents and the community believe that the promises are for their children as well. Infant baptism is a marvelous reminder of God's

grace as each one of us comes just like that helpless baby before God and God reaches out to bring us into the covenant community. We affirm that God's grace extends to us before any of us are able to choose faith for ourselves. A very reformed doctrine!!

A friend and mentor, Rev. Dr. Christian Boyd preached a memorable sermon for the Presbytery of Ohio Valley on baptism. I remember Christian reminding us to 'stay wet with your baptism'. He said that as we remember our baptism, we are reminded that we:

- are children of God
- there is meaning and purpose to our lives
- die to ourselves, die to our own self-preoccupation and rise to a life that is sanctified and usable to the glory of God.
- we are never without our baptism so whether we wash dishes for a living or are the President of an esteemed college, the Spirit of God shines forth in our actions and in our words.

When I baptize a person, I warn them and the congregation in advance that they are going to get wet. There is a reason I do this. I do it because God's grace isn't given to us in a miserly way. The abundance of water reminds us of the abundance of God's grace that we receive every day of our lives.

Today I invite you to remember your own baptism. For some of us we may have a distinct memory of our baptism because we were old enough to choose to be baptized. For some of us we may not have a memory of it as we may have been baptized as infants. Yet it is always good to be reminded that as baptized persons we have this seal by God's Holy Spirit on our hearts.

I always invite anyone who has questions about baptism or their own baptism to give me a call. I am always happy to talk.

Let us pray: Creator God, we thank you and we bring you our praise. You are the Lord, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, yet, you chose to come and be with us, your creation in the person of Jesus Christ. We thank you that even today we can follow the example of Jesus in baptism and in the taking of communion. Thank you that through these acts that use common elements a the uncommon occurs. Through the sacraments you seal on our hearts your Holy Spirit. Remind us today and everyday to stay wet with our baptism by reminding ourselves that we are indeed your children. Amen

