

Mark 1:4-11
Baptism & Holy Communion
Sunday Sept. 3, 2017

Well today we are talking about Christian baptism and how it is intimately connected to Holy Communion. We are privileged in that in one service we have not only celebrated the sacrament of Baptism, but will celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion.



Note from the first verse of our scripture today that baptism is not specifically a Christian ritual. Long before Christianity came on the scene Jews were baptizing converts to their faith.

Baptism for the Jews was an initiation into faith for converts. Baptism for Christians is still the same. It is an initiation into our faith.

John's baptism was for repentance and the forgiveness of sin. Christian baptism is the same. We pick up baptism where John left off and note that Christian Baptism includes baptism by the Holy Spirit. For as John the Baptist said in verse 8, "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

And in Acts 1:5 Jesus says, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Paul later in Acts, comes across some believers who were baptized into John's baptism of repentance, but not into Jesus' baptism of the Holy Spirit. Paul then baptizes them in Jesus name and the Holy Spirit comes on them.

John baptized simply for repentance and his message was to believe in the One to follow him, that is, in Jesus. When the believers, we met in Acts, were baptized into Jesus the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Now the reason John's baptism was different from the common Jewish practice of baptizing only converts to Judaism was that John was baptizing everybody!

John was calling everyone to return to the wilderness where Israel was formed, taught and cleansed before entering the Holy Land. John was calling all of Israel to be cleansed through repentance of sin and baptism.



What John was doing was offering the grace and forgiveness of God outside of the sacrificial system of the Temple for the atonement/forgiveness of sin. It was scandalous what John was doing, but it was the sign for Jesus Christ to begin His work.

If you think about it- why did Jesus have to be baptized? Baptism is for repentance and forgiveness of sin! Jesus was the only sinless human being so why did He insist on being baptized?

There is a four fold reason for this that I will lay out briefly from the writings of Dr. Barkley.

1st - **For Jesus Christ baptism was a moment of decision.** His baptism was a sign to Himself and the world that he consciously pick-up and pursue His true purpose and calling.

2nd - **Jesus Christ by doing this identified with the sinful masses.** No one can say they are too good for baptism if Jesus Christ Himself choose to be baptized. And in that baptism is symbol and sign of death and resurrection - Jesus let the people know right up front that He would take their sin upon Him.

3rd - **It was a moment of approval and validation.** God spoke directly to

Jesus Christ and said, “You are my Son, the Beloved”. Later we will get into how important this phrase is for us.

4th - **It was a time of equipment.** The Holy Spirit came upon Him. No where in the New Testament is Christian Baptism without the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now I want to give some very practical teaching about Baptism. The more we know about Baptism the more it can increase our faith and hope. As we remember our baptism, which we are reminded of when we receive Holy Communion, we can be inspired by the marvelous gift that has been given us.

There is a lot of misunderstanding about infant baptism that the following story from Mikey’s Funnies reminds us of.

“After the christening of his baby brother in church, little Johnny sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally the boy replied, “That priest said he wanted us to brought-up in a Christian home, and I want to stay with you guys!”

Sometimes our children don’t know who we are and who they are: Christians, **the beloved adopted children of God.**

Now we as Methodists we never Christen babies. We baptize babies! Christening refers to giving someone a Christian name, which some churches do in a ritual in which babies are dedicated to God. Some refer to Baptism, though, as Christening because in baptism we take on our Christian name.

Note when Elizabeth Rose was baptized I asked, **“What name be given this child”**.

I then baptized her using her first name not her last or surname; our

first names are our Christian names.

Now when an infant is baptized (as well as children and adults) they are baptized into Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. As Romans 6:3-4 says, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that,

just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Infants are passive receivers of God's gift of Grace and Salvation. The baptism of infants declares that what is important in baptism is not what we do, but what God does! The passive nature of an infant in Baptism declares that it is God's action that calls and chooses us through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, "you did not choose me but I chose you".

Before any of us were ever born God's salvation came into this world through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, which we remember in Holy Communion. But we need to claim our salvation, which we do in baptism. As I said last week, it's our "response-ability" to receive the gift.

That's why through the centuries Christian churches have always taught that what makes Baptism valid is not the pastor, priest or church, but God. In cases of emergency or imminent death lay people can baptize if a person asks for it and has never been baptized.

Christian Churches accept one another's baptism if done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and water is used.

The form of Baptism does not matter either. You can be immersed, poured or sprinkled. All are valid baptism. Each symbolizes different aspects of what happens in baptism.

Immersion reminds us more of our death to sin and resurrection to new life as we go under and then out of the water.

Pouring reminds us of being cleansed by the blood of Jesus as well as the out pouring of the Holy Spirit at baptism.

Sprinkling which we do most as Methodists, reminds us of being cleansed by the blood of Jesus and that as Jesus hung and bled on the cross His blood baptized the whole world. His salvation is available for all!

Now what happens when we are baptized? In some deep spiritual way we are marked as Christians. We are marked as the elect and this teaching goes as far back as St. Augustine. In some sense I believe we are spiritually tattooed as Christians.

Now can tattoos be removed? Yes, but not perfectly. In some sense even those who turn against Christ retain the mark.

Will baptism alone save you? I don't think so. You must live out the gift for it to be effective. Jesus in John 3:5 said, "Very truly, I tell you no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit." To be born of the Spirit your life must demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit if time and circumstance allow.

To be baptized and not raised in the Church. Or to be baptized and then drop out of the church at Confirmation, or some time later is like getting a lifetime pass to Disney World, going up to the gate and then simply walking away without entering in.



For the church is the creation of the Holy Spirit. To be separated from the church the community of believers is to miss out on all the good

gifts of love you can receive in the church. It is to miss out on discovering your gifts of the Spirit; so that you also miss out on your God given purpose in serving within the church.

I baptize only infants whose parents are members of a church and intend to raise their child in the church. For as you read the baptismal vows today you can see the parents make promises to God. They stand before God and God's people the church and promise **to raise the child in the church until they can believe on their own** and we too, as the church make promises to child. It's not wise to stand before God and God's altar and lie.

Even though baptism does leave a mark, "it's not a magical act. It alone is not a pass to paradise. Baptism must be lived out in the church, and not consciously rejected to be effective. Otherwise it can be a sort' a cute but meaningless public ritual.

In Baptism we receive the gifts of Holy Spirit. Now are they as immediately spectacular as the gifts of tongues and prophecy we read about in the Acts? No, but gifts of the Holy Spirit are there none the less and must be awakened through practice, use, participation and daring.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit are given in baptism and are awakened and used at different times in our lives, and discovered within the fellowship of the Church. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, **"To each has been given a gift of the Spirit for the good of all."**

Christianity is as much about belonging as believing. It's when we belong and participate that with time we discover our gifts.

I was 40 some years old before I discovered I had any real public speaking ability. I thought, of all the gifts of the Spirit, preaching wasn't very evident in my life. Then I had to start preaching regularly and low and behold I found I could.

Be daring and when signs come in your life to try something new

for God do it! You might be amazed like I was! You might be tremendously gifted and used like Jesus was.

Now earlier I said I would speak about how the phrase, “You are my son, the beloved” is important to all of us.

Hold on for one last story. It’s a true story and some of the details have grown fuzzy with time but not the point.

“A reporter came across a rather famous politician a state governor in a roadside restaurant. The reporter asked the politician where he got the confidence to be where he was today.

The governor said that as a child he didn’t have a father and one day a traveling evangelist came to town and the little church he was in. The evangelist heard of his circumstances and asked him what might at first be thought a cruel question, “Who’s your father?”

As a young boy he hung his head and said, “I don’t have a father.”

The evangelist said, “That’s right you do not have an earthly father, but you have a royal Father, and a royal family- a Father in heaven. And do you know what that makes you? You are God’s heir, a prince and the Kingdom of God is yours!”

Never let anyone tell you that you don’t have a Father and that you aren’t valued and loved. This governor lived out of the confidence and power of those words and succeeded in life.”

My friends when we are baptized into Jesus we are baptized into his baptism, His death, His resurrection. We stand with Jesus in the Jordan River and hear God’s word to us! **“You are my son or daughter! You are beloved!”**

And monthly when we receive Holy Communion we are reminded again of the Gift of our Salvation that came through Jesus’ death and

resurrection. In fact that is the connection between Baptism and Holy Communion. They both proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection and the forgiveness of our sin that grants eternal life until he comes in all his glory! As we receive Holy Communion today, let us remember our baptism and be thankful. In Jesus' Name, Amen!