

## **Thoughts on Baptism**

Parting Thoughts: Part 3 “Thoughts on Baptism”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – June 16<sup>th</sup> 2024

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Readings:** Acts 8:9-24; Galatians 3:15-29; Matthew 3:1-17

**Reflection:** Psalm 51

**Greeting:** Praise the Lord, all you nations! Worship him, all you peoples! Because God’s faithful love toward us is strong, the Lord’s faithfulness lasts forever! Praise the Lord!

**Prayer:** Lord, we thank you for your presence with us day by day. We thank you for calling us to the celebration of your love by water and the Spirit. Helps us to remember your steadfast love and faithfulness all the days of our lives. May we always remember the salvation we find in your Son, our savior when we remember the sacrifice made in love. Bring us together this day that we can share in the redemption that we find in your call to repentance and the grace that we discover with you, our Lord. We pray that we may always seek your peace and to share your love with one another. Help us to celebrate the hope that we have because you are with us forever and always, and it is in Jesus’ name we pray this day. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 51

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:1-17 NRSVue\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 51 and hear of God's forgiveness. That when we have sinned we may find help with the Lord. That in times of trouble we have an advocate in Christ. That we can be washed clean before God and made whole once again. What draws you closer in love with our God? How do you share that love with others? Who are you lifting in your prayers this week? Who will you share the peace of Christ with? How do you seek forgiveness? How do you share the forgiveness we find together in Christ? How can we share in the love that we find in sharing in God's peace together?

**Prayer:** Everlasting God, you have brought us together that we may remember the salvation that we find through the water and the Spirit. We are all invited to make a commitment to join together as God's people as declared in baptism. Help us to experience your love each and every day. We turn to you now with the joys and the concerns that we bring before you this day. May you grant us comfort and guidance in all things. We lift up our celebrations that we have spoken before you. We lift up the concerns that we share together. We also bring before you the silent troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that we experience your grace and mercy in our laughter and our tears and that you are with us in sorrow and rejoicing. Grant that we may always hold firm and joyfully to this faith, and may we be one with you, who calls us in love to his table, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Prayer for Father's Day:** Lord, today we give thanks to you for the fathers in our lives. We give thanks for the dads, the grandpas, the uncles, the in-law, and all those that have given us a father's care. We thank you for putting these people into our lives to help us, to guide us, to lead us, and to care for us. We give thanks for the love they have shown. We lift up our prayers for healing as we remember those who are no longer with us in this life. We lift up our prayers in thanks for those who are. We lift up prayers of hope for those just becoming fathers, that you may help them to grow in love. And may we always give thanks and help each other to grow in the love of our Heavenly Father. And it is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 8, verse 9 through 24.

*Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place. Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent*

*Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness." Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me." (Acts 8:9-24 NRSVue\*)*

Our next reading is from Galatians chapter 3, verse 15 through 29.

*Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, "And to offsprings," as of many, but it says, "And to your offspring," that is, to one person, who is Christ. My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise, but God granted it to Abraham through the promise. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made, and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. Now a mediator involves more than one party, but God is one. Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be reckoned as righteous by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:15-29 NRSVue\*)*

Our final reading is from Matthew chapter 3, verse 1 through 17.

*In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.' " Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, bear fruit worthy of*

*repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God's Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:1-17 NRSVue\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week we have thoughts about baptism. This is one of two sacraments within the United Methodists Church, with the other being Communion. They are our two sacraments because they are the two things that Jesus called us to do. With our look at baptism, we explore what it means to us. Our readings today look at the importance of baptism. We begin with Matthew's accounting of the baptism of Christ. John is out baptizing people in the Jordan river. But he is not baptizing in the way we think of it today, because he is not baptizing in the name of Christ. He is not baptizing by water and the Spirit, but just with water for the forgiveness of sins. But he is preparing people for Christ, declaring that he will baptize with both water and Spirit. Baptism is there as an act of repentance, symbolically being washed clean. John's baptism is much like our baptism in that it was a step in the journey, not the destination. He is preparing the way for Christ to make people ready for the one that will baptize with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus comes to be baptized, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove to rest on him. And this is the act that begins Jesus public ministry. In many ways, baptism is that act that we go through to begin our own public ministry. We enter into baptism in the name of Christ, and we then share the good news.

We hear this from Paul in Galatians with the way that Paul speaks of baptism and the way it changes us. Because baptism is also a promise that we make, a covenant that we enter into. Before we discussed the promise of Christ in the way that we think about being redeemed in his blood that we remember when we drink from one cup. We are also called to remember the promise made in our baptism because it is a promise of hope. It is about our own future. We remember that the law brings punishment, but entering into a life in Christ makes us aware of the promise of salvation, the promise of redemption, and the promise of grace. We experience those things by faith in baptism. Because baptism is a sign that this is a life we want. We are reminded that we are made equal in Christ. We are children of God by faith. Baptism is the act of washing ourselves clean of sin and clothing ourselves in Christ. That like Abraham, we inherit the promise as children of God by faith in Christ. That through Christ we

are all equal. As Paul says, there is no Jew nor Greek, no longer slave or free, there is no male or female, there is no distinction as children of God through faith in Christ. We can apply this to anything that is used to divide us. There is no distinction by gender, by race, by upbringing, by class, or by any other means that we use to draw lines. None of those matter in the eyes of the Lord. We accept that when we put on Christ in baptism that we are one in Christ Jesus, that we are together in Christ, and that we are made whole through Christ. Baptism is a sign that we accept this gift of grace. But it is not a gift we accept lightly, because we accept it with a promise of responsibility. But it is a gift that is freely given that we may freely accept.

We hear this in Acts as we hear of those being baptized in the early church. Philip is out baptizing people and proclaiming the good news. And people are coming to him to receive John's baptism, the baptism for the repentance of sin. They believe what Philip says about the Kingdom of God, they believe what he teaches about Jesus, so they come to be baptized. This includes a magician who has been seen as powerful and great, yet he himself asks to be baptized. Peter and John hear about these people being baptized and they head in that direction. They know people are being baptized in Jesus' name, but they have not yet received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John begin to lay hands on people so that they are also then baptized in the Spirit. Simon, our magician from before, sees this and wants this power. We know that he already was baptized in Jesus' name, so he is a believer. He may just want to be able to share the Holy Spirit in the same way John and Peter are. But he thinks that he needs to purchase this power. He offers them money so that he can learn how to share the Holy Spirit. The problem is that you cannot gain a gift from God with money. It would be wrong for him to buy it just as it would be wrong for Peter and John to sell it. They let him know that his money is worthless in obtaining this gift and that it is wrong to try to buy the Holy Spirit. But he is also informed that forgiveness is freely available as well. He asks that they pray for him. I really don't think he understood that it was a free gift. That stood out to me and was a reason I included this particular baptism account. The gift by the water and the Spirit is free to all people. Simon simply thought that it was like most things in this life where you have to pay, and when he was informed he was wrong, he repents freely. But another thing to take away from this is the free gift of grace that we all have in baptism. God is not something that we simply sell. Christ is not bought and sold in a marketplace. Being able to experience Christ in this way is a gift that was freely offered to us, so we must let others know it is a free gift in love.

When we remember our own baptism, we may have very different memories. If you were baptized as an infant, you may not remember your own baptism. But we can remember the promise that we are under when we read the baptismal vows, which we will be doing as part of this service. You might remember later in life confirming your baptism. Because baptism in the United Methodist Church is a community event. When we come together and celebrate baptism, we celebrate those being baptized as becoming a part of a community of faith. If you are baptized as an infant, others promise to help do their best to support you. If, like me, you were baptized as an adult, you may remember the moment that you entered into that promise.

Or it might have been when you confirmed your vows and celebrated your faith. That we come together in baptism to support the church of Christ by loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. And if you have never received the gift of baptism, I encourage you to talk to me about it. Because I can tell you about my baptism. I knew I was forgiven, and I knew I received the Holy Spirit. But I also understood that I had undergone an act of adoption. That in my promise to follow Christ I had become part of a family in Christ. That we enter that covenant becoming children of God, siblings in our Lord Jesus. When we remember our baptism, we remember that we can be forgiven no matter what. We remember that we are children of God, welcome in his Kingdom. That there is always a place set for us at the table. That we are part of a community of faith that will always be there to support us. That we have the Holy Spirit as our guide to help us through every difficulty that life may throw our way. We remember that we are offered this grace freely that we may be forgiven and may call others to forgiveness. It is an act that signals our own public ministry to share the good news of Jesus Christ. I encourage you this day to reflect on your baptism and what it means to you. And if you have not yet taken that step, I would love for you to consider accepting that love and that community as part of your life. Because we are all equal in Christ. We are all forgiven in Christ. We are all loved in Christ. And God welcomes all people to live a life of joy in our Lord and Savior. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Parting Thoughts**

My last sermon series is going to be a series of parting thoughts. This will cover a handful of different topics and isn't going to be quite like other sermon series that I've done. We will look at various theological points and the way that we live our faith. Before I go, I'll leave you with a few parting thoughts about various subjects. But know that I leave with a thankful heart.

### **Prayer List**

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Jeff & Laurie Davidson
Connie Brown	Thelma Ball	Stephanie Strewsbury	John Graves
Cathleen Carl	Vivian Hallet	Marilyn Scott	Jim Stevens
Wes Martin	Mary Shumaker	Matthew Shoaff	Family of Donna Cutright
Family of Roger Nickum	Eric Wilson	Joan Martin	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells	Earl Sparks
Susie Kemper			

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