



from the desk of . . .

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Baptism

THE OTHER SACRAMENT

Ephesians 4:1-6

In 5 weeks, we'll be celebrating "Reformation Sunday." It's when we recognize the beginnings of the "Protestant" Church movement. Martin Luther, (X) a monk & theology professor, "protested" against the corruption taking place in the Roman Catholic Church.

Now Martin Luther was an amazing individual. In the list of the 1,000 most influential persons in the past 1,000 years, he ranks #3! Each of us are worshiping here today in a large part, because of Martin Luther.

And if he were standing here, & we had an opportunity to question him concerning his faith & beliefs & hear his testimony, I suspect in his response would be a 3-word sentence ... "I am baptized."

Those 3 words were part of Luther's daily routine. When he awoke each morning, he would make a sign of the cross, & then he would say ... "I am baptized" as part of his preparation for whatever the Lord had in store for him during that day.

Here at C.C.R.M. we celebrate the Sacrament of The Lord's Supper 13 times each year ... the 1st Sunday of each month, & on Maundy Thursday of Holy Week. It's a regular part of our worship experience. We look forward to it ... & most of us have participated countless times.

And while we may have some sense of what Holy Communion is all about, to be honest, we're a little fuzzy on the other Sacrament. So, this morning we're focusing on it ... beginning with the songs we've already sung, & then participating in Madison's Baptism, & now we're going to spend a few moments seeing what the Scriptures have to say about it.

So, let's begin by listening to Good News, as recorded by the Apostle Paul, to the Church in Ephesus, & to the Church here in Rolling Meadows.

Within your hearing now comes the Word of the Lord ...

Live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you. Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together. There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

Now because we come here from many different theological traditions, I want to begin by asking ... how many of you have been baptized? ... Now, how many of you were baptized when you were infants or babies? ... How many of you were baptized as older children or adults? ...

Obviously, you remember more about that particular worship experience than I remember about my Baptism, which took place when I was 11 months old.

Now if this were a Bible Study, & we went around the room asking each person what your Baptism has meant to you in your life ...

I suspect that we'd have dozens of differing opinions.

It certainly was important for Martin Luther. He acknowledged it every day ... "I am baptized."

But for others of us ... maybe it was no big deal. In fact, I wonder how many of us even remember the date of our Baptism? ...

Today is Bill's birthday. And each year, for the past 90 years, it has been celebrated, & rightfully so.

But what about our Baptisms? ...

Over the years I've tried to acknowledge the anniversaries of a person's Baptism by sending a card, because I believe that it's a significant & vital step in each individual's spiritual pilgrimage.

Some people look at Baptism as simply a Church ordinance, commanded by Jesus certainly, but a command with no apparent spiritual benefit. In other words, Jesus said do it, so we do it ...

but Baptism doesn't really do anything for us.

Others see Baptism in a "society" kind of way. It's viewed as a religious ceremony, much like a wedding or a funeral, helping people through certain major events in their lives.

Still others, when they consider Baptism, think of the extras: the pretty lace gown, the burning candle, the smiling parents, & the cute gurgling, & sometimes screaming, baby. (And there's nothing wrong with gowns & candles & smiles & even screaming babies.)

But, what does it really mean to be baptized? ...

To answer that question, we need to begin by going to the O.T. Every N.T. teaching has its' roots in the O.T. If we want to understand the doctrine of sin, we must begin with Genesis. If we want to grasp the wonder of the cross, we must read the Pentateuch, (the 1st 5 books), & the Prophets.

And if we want to know what the Bible teaches about Baptism of infants, we must begin with Abraham.

"Abram put his trust in the LORD, & because of this the LORD was pleased with him & accepted him." (Genesis 15:6)
In other words, Abraham is our O.T. counterpart. Just as we are sinners saved by grace through believing, he was a sinner saved by grace through believing.

God calls this saving relationship "an everlasting covenant," (Genesis 17:7) ... a covenant to all "future generations."

Almighty God made a **covenant** with a sinful creature.

And He gave Abraham a **sign**, circumcision, which "will show that there is a covenant between you & me."
(Genesis 17:11-12)

Next Saturday I'm going to be marrying Sue & Henry's son, Korey, to his fiancée, Sarah. They will make a marriage covenant to each other, & give each other a ring as a sign of it. The ring is more than a piece of jewelry, it's a symbol of the greatest pledge a person can make to another human being.

In the same way, **circumcision** was a sign of God's salvation to Abraham. (When an adult from outside of Judaism became a believer, he was to be circumcised.)
(Exodus 12:48)

Now interestingly, in the O.T. God regularly uses the word "circumcision" in place of "salvation".

The "saved" person was called "circumcised"; the "unsaved" person was called "uncircumcised". (Ezekiel 44:9)

Now, please don't misunderstand, circumcision didn't save the person ... their faith did. Again, listen to what Scripture teaches ...

"Abraham believed God, & because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.' When did this take place? Was it before or after Abraham was circumcised?

It was after. He was circumcised later, & his circumcision was a sign to show that because of his faith God had accepted him as righteous before he had been circumcised." (Romans 4:11)

Now, for those of you who are sitting there thinking ... "circumcision is a sign of salvation in the O.T., so what?" Hold on ... we're getting there.

Let's continue on with God's command to Abraham.

"From now on you must circumcise every baby boy when he is 8 days old ... this will show that there is a covenant between you & me." (Genesis 17:11-12)

In other words, God was telling Abraham to apply this sign of salvation to **infants** born into his house. ... Obviously this is before the infant believed. So ...

- Abraham was a sinner saved by grace through faith
- God made circumcision a sign of salvation
- The sign of salvation was to be given to infants of believing parents

Okay, let's jump to the N.T. Jesus told His disciples to make other disciples & baptize them. (Matthew 28:19) So when Peter preached his 1st sermon & 3,000 believed, immediately the Apostles started baptizing them. (The Acts 2:41) Why? ... Because that's what Jesus said to do.

If a man was converted in the middle of the night, he was baptized then. (The Acts 16:33) If a person came to faith out on the road somewhere, they were baptized right there. (The Acts 8:38)

Had we lived back then ...
what strange Baptisms we would have observed!

Okay, how is a person baptized? ... Water is applied to them. I don't have the time this morning to get into whether the water should be sprinkled or poured, or if the person should be dunked ... let me just say that water, in some way, is applied to the individual.

But, it's different than a bath or shower, or simply washing our hands. Baptism has to do with a person's **relationship to God**. In Biblical Baptism, water is applied to the individual

"in the name of the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit."

In other words, God is using an outward **symbol** to denote an inward **spiritual reality**. Like circumcision, Baptism is a sign.

Now it's easy to understand why God chose water.

Water is used all over the world to make our bodies clean. So, God chose this universal cleanser to be a sign of spiritual cleansing. That's why Ananias instructs Paul, after he came to faith ... "Get up & be baptized & have your sins washed away." (The Acts 22:16)

In fact, the sign of Baptism is so closely identified with faith in the N.T. that some denominations even teach that it's essential for salvation.

But, water Baptism is **only** a sign of salvation. "For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Baptism is an outward sign of this inward work.

Now, & this is important, as people came to faith in the N.T., not only were they baptized,
but their families were also.

Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira, believed the Gospel, & Paul baptized both her "& those in her house." (The Acts 16:15) Likewise, when the Philippian jailer believed "he & all his family were baptized." (The Acts 16:33) (Paul also talks about baptizing "Stephanas & his family.")

(1 Corinthians 1:16)

As the Gospel message began to go out into the world, there was a new sign ... but believing parents had the same responsibility & blessing as Abraham ...
& baptized their children.

Baptism has taken the place of circumcision
as the **sign of salvation**.

That's why I don't have a service of circumcision for new babies born in our congregation. It's no longer a sign of salvation. And it's why we don't circumcise adults that come to faith. Baptism is the fulfillment of circumcision.

Let me add just a couple more important points. Baptism should be done here in the **fellowship** of the **Church**.

When the water is poured over the head of a child, like Madison, at that very moment, that girl or boy, that man or woman, ceases being separated from God, & ceases being separated from the rest of us who believe in Jesus Christ & are baptized, too.

To the crowd in Jerusalem, Peter said ...

"Each one of you must turn away from your sins & be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; & you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit. For God's promise was made to you & your children, & to all who are far away - all whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (The Acts 2:38-39)

We don't exist as followers of Jesus independent of other Christians, nor can we exist independent of a Christian congregation.

Do you know what characterized the early Church? ...

Luke tells us in The Acts ...

"They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, & sharing in the fellowship meals & the prayers. ... Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, & they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad & humble hearts, praising God, & enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved." (The Acts 2:42,46-47)

Baptism means being an **active member** of a Christian community.

We also understand that Baptism to be something God **does** for us ... not something we **can do** to ourselves.

We believe that God has a plan & purpose for us, even before we're born. (Jeremiah 1:5) And in that plan He not only determines the ends, but also the means, by which we come to a personal knowledge & faith of Him.

For many of us, our Baptism was our 1st initiation into God's Church ... & the beginning of this amazing spiritual journey that we're on.

I remember hearing a sermon once where the preacher said ... "Remember your baptism & be thankful." I thought ... "Remember my baptism?" I was only 11 month's old! But while I don't remember my Baptism, there's a lot I do remember.

I remember going to Church every Sunday morning. I remember my S.S. rooms. I remember some of my S.S. teachers who taught me Bible stories. I remember bits of sermons that Dr. Lawrence & Rev. Crozier preached. I remember some of the faces of people who smiled at me & made me feel loved & important.

We celebrate Baptism because we believe that there's a **grace** that goes before us. We believe that God is working from the time we're born to bring us to the point in our lives where we come to faith. (Galatians 3:26)

When a baby is baptized, his or her parents make a vow to God before the Church. Jeremiah & Jennifer promised "to teach Madison the truths & duties of the Christian faith; & by prayer, instruction, & example to bring her up in the nurture & admonition of the Lord, & in the ways of the Church of God."

And then you, the members of C.C.R.M., promised "to tell Madison the Good News of the Gospel, to help her know all that Christ commands, & by your fellowship, strengthen her family ties with the household of God."

In other words, for Madison,
today is her initiation into God's Church.
This is the beginning of her amazing spiritual journey.

And this 18-month-old girl gets it perfectly.
She completely understands it!

Last Sunday, as Jeremiah & Jennifer were carrying her out of the sanctuary, Madison looked at me ...
& threw me a kiss.

Now, the truth of the matter is ... that kiss wasn't only for me ... it was for all of you. She was throwing a kiss to all of the people who have been living examples of Christ in her life here at C.C.R.M. (1 Corinthians 11:1) She was kissing you folks ... through whom she knows a love that is unconditional & overwhelming. (John 15:12)

Let me say this as clearly as I can. I absolutely love how we relate to one another here at C.C.R.M. I love that Diondra, who was baptized here on 28 November 2010, feels accepted enough by her Church family to want to do special music during a worship service. I love that Preston, who was baptized here on 13 April 2008, feels comfortable enough to come into my office after worship & ask me to explain a point in my sermon.

We cannot know the love of God until we experience it for ourselves. God is the One who initiates that love, (1 John 4:19), & the Church is the Body of Christ called to live out that love here on earth. And you do it here!

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we're given a glimpse of God's acceptance of us, & we in turn, accept one another. (Romans 15:7) In Baptism, it's God who **claims** us ... not the other way around. (John 15:16)

And there's no greater security in all the world.

There's nothing we can do to make God love us any more, or any less, than He does right now. That's why we Baptize infants. It reminds us of His love,
 which is **unmerited ... & unearned**. (Romans 9:12)

We don't believe that "infant" Baptism, (by the way, there's no such term in Scripture) ... we don't believe that "infant" Baptism saves us, or our children. Nor does "adult" or "believer's" Baptism, (terms also not found in Scripture) ... save us.

But we do believe that Baptism is something that God does for us. That's why we don't "re-baptize" people. "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

Through the Sacrament of Baptism,
 we're given a glimpse of God's acceptance of us.

I don't remember my Baptism, but my entire life has been built upon it. And, 24 years later, there came a day when I accepted God's free gift of salvation for myself ... & my life has never been the same! "I am baptized."

And those words don't just belong to Martin Luther. They belong to each & every person who knows they are loved beyond measure by a God who has claimed them as His own!

I am thankful for my Baptism! How about you? ...

MARANA THA