

What Do We Mean When We Baptize a Person?

1 Cor. 12:12-13

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North Decatur Presbyterian Church

Rev. David Lewicki, preaching

I want to take a moment this morning to remember our own baptisms.

- *Take a minute and share the story of your baptism with your neighbor. If you haven't been baptized, talk about a baptism that you remember. Where. When. Who was there?*

Here's a harder question: *what has been the significance of your baptism in your life?*

We don't do a great job reminding each other of the significance of baptism.

- There are fewer kids in church than in days gone by, so we don't have a baptism every week in worship. Each of us only gets one chance at it. Many of you don't remember it because you were an infant. If we don't do something often, it's hard to keep that memory in our body
- We do a reaffirmation of baptismal vows on the first Sunday in January. We try and give a nod to your baptism every week in worship... how? We offer the assurance of grace from the baptismal font and we throw water at you. We want you, each Sunday, to remember that your baptism isn't a one-time event. **Baptism is an ongoing immersion in the love and mercy of God**

That's what I want you to think about today. Baptism--not as a one-time event, but as a way of life.

What is baptism? Baptism is wrapped up in our relationship to water. Last week, we said to understand communion you should see it as an actual meal meant to nourish your body. In the same way, think about baptism by starting with what is most basic about it: it's a celebration of water. Specifically, what God does in and through water.

What does water do?

- It's all around us. It's essential to life
- We drink it.
- It cleans us.

Is life possible without water? No. Water is life.

It makes sense that when God wants to join us into the family of living things, to bring us into the unending life of God, God uses water.

How does God use water? The Scriptures are full of powerful stories.

(“underwater” image)

It begins with the first **Creation** story. According to Genesis, what was there at the beginning? Water. We somehow got convinced that God created the world from nothing, but it's really creation from water; God's Spirit moves over the waters of Creation. Creation emerges from water. God eventually separates the waters above from the waters below--we still live encased in water. Science confirms this same idea: we know about the water cycle; watersheds. All life comes from--and is sustained by--water

(Noah image)

The next time we see water in Genesis is in the story of **Noah**. I've talked about this story a few times with you. It's a hard story to read. There is so much evil on the earth among human beings, God decides we're not fixable. God tells Noah to build a boat, take two of every animal inside, and then the rains begin. And every living thing is swallowed up by water. This is an awful, cleansing, purifying water.

(Exodus image)

God makes another big splash with water in **Exodus**. God people are slaves in Egypt, making bricks for pharaoh. God decides to free them. The people run into the desert, but they come to the edge of the sea and they are trapped between the water and pharaoh's pursuing warriors. **God divides the waters of the sea...** the people walk through to safety. God closes the water on pharaoh's army and drowns them.

Water is the means for human liberation and also something that swallows up sin. Water is full of promise; there's also danger in it. Always with water, there is this duality.

(stream image)

In the time of Israel's kings, the prophets preach about water. They say: water is how God will deliver the people from injustice.

- Micah says God's justice will roll down like water and righteousness like a flowing stream
- Ezekiel, imagines a re-built Temple flowing with water from every side; that water is for healing
- Isaiah says that when God delivers God's people, there will be water in the desert

Flowing water, for the prophets, is a metaphor for human dignity and justice.

Then, along comes Jesus. Jesus is no stranger to water, either.

(Jesus baptism image)

The first thing in Mark, Jesus goes into the water. John has taken a Jewish purification ritual and he's invested it with fresh meaning. He says to people that if you wade into the water of Jordan, go all the way down under the water, when you come out you will be changed.

- John's baptism is a baptism of life change.

- It's an answer to one of life's great questions: can we change? Are we stuck the way we are, in unhealthy habits, in systems that exploit, or can we change?
- God's waters contain the promise that we can change.
- It's the duality of water. God can both drown the power of sin within us and around us. In a water baptism, God can also make us new people--people who turn, in every circumstance, toward justice, mercy, kindness, compassion, peace.

Jesus walks along the sea of Galilee; invites fisherman as disciples. He is never far from water.

- He even walk on the water, hovering over the water like the Spirit at the dawn of Creation; Jesus calms raging seas with a word.

(woman at the well image)

The most moving story about Jesus and water is the one where Jesus meets a woman at a well. It's the longest conversation Jesus has in the gospels. Recent scholarship on this text suggests that this woman is being portrayed as an ideal disciple. As they stand by the well, she knows the power of the water; she knows that water is life. Jesus says to her, **I am living water.**

- It's not just that we live in a Creation full of water. It's not just that water can swallow up sin and cleanse us. Water must be taken in. We must drink it, every day.
- Every day, we come to the well of Jesus' wisdom, Jesus mercy, Jesus' love. That living water is life.

Your baptism is your initiation into what we might think of as the hydrodynamics of God, Life, in the Spirit is fluid. Change is possible. Justice for all of God's children is as close as a flowing stream.

Your baptism only happens once. But the living water--the water that heals, rights wrongs, forgives sin, creates Beloved Community--the living water is yours to drink every day.

Water is life. That's what we mean when we are baptized.