

Belonging through Baptism
A New Creation – Unit II: Session 3
May 20, 2018

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

⁴ John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

¹⁵ Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:1-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

This morning we are continuing our series *A New Creation*, based on 2 Corinthians 5:17, that “if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” This morning we are looking at the important element of “Belonging.” The title of the message this morning is “Belonging through Baptism.”

Shortly after creating human beings and giving them free will, free will to choose to follow God’s ways or to choose one’s own ways, God began calling a people to Himself – a people who would live by faith in God, faith that God knows better how we should live than we ourselves

know. Yes, all humans have been created in God's image but all of us have been marred by the fall – the original sin of Adam & Eve in the Garden. Even before the fall, before that original sin, man and woman, or I should say woman and then man, wanted to decide for themselves how they should live. And the result was disastrous, both then and all the way to this day, thousands of years later.

But God, who has always been rich in mercy and grace chose to call a people to Himself, a people who would not only live by faith but who would live as best they could the way God intended for people to live here on earth .

God first chose the Israelites and He set before them the Law, found especially in the first five books of the Old Testament, sometimes referred to as the Pentateuch. God entered into covenant with His people, that if they would live the way that He intended for them to live, He would never leave them or forsake them. He would be their God and they would be His people. And there was a sign for the covenant. The sign of the Old Testament covenant was circumcision for all males who would commit themselves to God, both for those who were born Jewish and for those who would enter in by faith. You see, it has always been about faith and God has always been the more faithful one. God rejected many of His original people not because they disobeyed Him and did not follow His laws perfectly, He rejected them because they refused to put all their faith and trust in Him.

Eventually God would send His Son Jesus to die for the sins of all mankind, those that lived here on earth before He came and those who have lived here on earth ever since and forevermore until Jesus returns. And He entered into a New Covenant with His people, that once again if they would be faithful, if they would put all their faith and trust in Him, and in His Son Jesus Christ, He would never leave them or forsake them, He would offer the gift of eternal life. The New Covenant is probably best captured in John 3:16 –

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

The sign of the New Covenant is baptism. Much less painful than circumcision! ☺ If there is any question that God is inclusive of all people who come to faith in Him, especially for females, just the sign of the new covenant of baptism – which can be done by both males and females, versus the sign of the old covenant of circumcision, should help us conclude that.

But as much as the sign of baptism is much easier and less painful to take part in than the sign of circumcision, you really wouldn't know it in our day by how some are so reluctant and hesitant to do it. Even many who call themselves Christians. Some are reluctant to do it because they aren't really sure they want to make that final commitment, or they think they are going to miss out on something really exciting in life if they commit to Jesus as both their Savior and Lord. They like the Savior part, but Jesus as Lord? They want to hold on to last little bit of freedom to choose, of individualism, just in case this Christianity thing doesn't quite work out as they hope. Some are afraid to get up in front of people and publically proclaim Jesus as their Savior and Lord. They're embarrassed or shy. For those who do not follow through with the act of baptism and cannot publically proclaim Jesus as their Savior and Lord, Jesus issued a pretty strong warning:

“Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven. Matthew 10:32-33 (NLT)

While it has been viewed differently by different denominations throughout the 2,000 year history of the church, almost all have seen baptism as a very important act in the life of a Christian. Roman Catholics, Lutherans and others see it as a sacrament, an act which instills God’s grace upon their infant children, basically saying that the child is saved just by that act, until he or she can make a decision for Christ on their own. That act, done when the child is around 14 or 15, is referred to as “confirmation.” The young adult is confirming the baptism that occurred when he or she was an infant. What Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and others are most concerned about is what happens to a child who dies before he or she can accept Jesus on their own?

Well for Anabaptists, whom the Mennonites are a part of, and many Protestant denominations, we do not believe in infant baptism. There seems to be little or **no** support for it in the Bible and we believe that Jesus watches over children until they reach the age where they can make an informed decision for themselves, to accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord and be baptized.

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them [do not stop them], for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Matthew 19:14 (NIV)

We dedicate our children to God, in much the same way that Hannah did with her son, Samuel, back in Old Testament times, and Zechariah & Elizabeth did with their son, John the Baptist, and Mary and Joseph with their son, Jesus, at the beginning of New Testament times.

I think that when it comes to child dedication and baptism, the same motto applies, “if it was good and important for Jesus, it should be good and important for his followers.”

There was absolutely no reason for Jesus to be baptized. He had no sin to repent of or to be cleansed from. But he did it as an act of initiation to begin his ministry here on earth. He did it as an act of obedience to His Father. While we are not saved by our obedience, in any shape or form, we are rewarded for it:

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:16-17 (NIV)

And if it wasn’t enough that Jesus himself was baptized to initiate his ministry, he commands his disciples to baptize future disciples at the conclusion of his ministry here on earth:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18b - 20 (NIV)

Not only is water baptism a sign of the Holy Spirit already working in a believer's life, it is also a sign of that person's commitment to Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and to His church. We believe that when one makes a public confession of their faith in Jesus, and is baptized, he or she becomes a member of Christ's church, both the Christian church in general and the local church he or she is part of.

The other reason that many people today struggle with going through with water baptism and becoming members of a church is that we live in a culture and society which is not so good with commitment – hence the number of marriages that end in divorce or permanent separation is still believed to be around 40-50%, and an increasing number who live together without ever getting married, many parents, especially men, but it is becoming increasingly common for women to abandon their children. There are many today who spend their entire lives bouncing from job to job, and many who go from one church to another to another. Not being a member makes it much easier to leave a church, a community of faith, just like not being married makes it much easier to leave a partner.

Both marriage and the church were designed by God to be demonstrations of His covenant love for His people through Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5 tells us that Jesus died for the church!

Which leads to the second most meaningful practice in which the Christian church has engaged in throughout its 2,000 year history, and that is the practice of the Lord's Supper or communion. That has been traditionally reserved for those who have been baptized or at least made a public confession of Jesus as one's Savior & Lord, beyond the age of accountability. Whereas baptism is a sign of our commitment to Christ and his church, the Lord's Supper or Communion, is a reaffirmation of the commitment we have already made.

Baptism & Communion are intrinsically connected. We really can't separate them.

Our last song of the second set of music this morning was "To the River!"

Our response song prior to our baptisms is "Come to the Table."