

Christ the Rock Lutheran Church, Farmington NM – January 10, 2021, The Baptism of Jesus

Our Lord Gives Us Life through Baptism

Text: Titus 3:3-8

How's your self-image doing these days? It's an important question. Research has shown that, even if surgery has erased ugly disfigurements, some people continue to live as though those disfigurements remain. On the other hand, some patients do the exact opposite. Some, who had let their disfigurement make them feel inferior, begin to regard themselves as winners. They become self-confident, outgoing and successful. Research has concluded that it is impossible for a person to behave consistently differently from what he sees himself to be.

This research may have discovered something new to psychology, but it is a principle as old as the Bible. Through Christ we have become a new creation – a new Christian person – called to a new life lived for our God. Paul talks about the self-image we Christians are now to carry with us when he says: *We were therefore buried with Christ through baptism into his death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.... Consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus* (Rom 6:4,11).

God calls us to a new life and a new self-image through Baptism. Our sermon today looks into that as we see that OUR LORD GIVES US LIFE THROUGH BAPTISM.

I.

In Titus 3, Paul describes the new Christian life. He begins by reminding Titus, WHAT WE WERE WITHOUT CHRIST. *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of evil desires and pleasures. We lived in malice and jealousy, being hated and hating one another* (3). Titus was a gentile – a non-Jew, as were most of the members in the congregation he served on the island of Crete. They were people who had not had knowledge of the Bible. Paul used strong words to describe the kind of people they had been: FOOLISH and therefore unable to know the truths of God; DISOBEDIENT to God's law and thus to law in general; DECEIVED into thinking that sin would lead to happiness when it's really only a vicious trap set to spring. Consider the sin of despising God's Word -- everything seems to be okay, until family problems, cancer or impending death comes and a person finds he has nothing to hold onto for comfort or strength. Consider the sin of sexual immorality – it seems like so much fun until it results in a marriage on the rocks and lives broken. Paul's list continues: ENSLAVED by all kinds of passions and pleasures which had become their ruler: MALICIOUS – full of bitterness and anger which primarily eats away at the heart and soul of the malicious one himself; ENVIOUS – not able to enjoy what blessings the person has because he is always thinking about those things that still have eluded him; BEING HATED -- because no one enjoys the company of a bitter person, no one wants to hang around with someone whose presence is like a dark raincloud over the picnic; and FILLED WITH HATE -- seeing only the bad in people. That's the spiritual condition Titus and his congregation came from.

That was our natural condition also. As the Bible puts it: *There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:22-23). The Bible describes each of us in our natural, human condition as *dead in trespasses and sin*. Our sin goes back before we were

born, for *certainly I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful from the time my mother conceived me* (Ps 51:5).

Some of us can relate to these words. If given the opportunity, some here today would be able to tell of lives apart from God, enslaved by alcohol or drugs, and in conflict with the values and beliefs now held.

Many of us, however, can't relate very closely to these words because of the great love God has shown us. God spared many of us the pain of finding out the hard way how unhappy and full of trouble a life without God can be. In his love God rescued many of us early in our lives from the pagans we were at birth. He rescued us back before we can remember. God supplied Christian parents who brought us to God in Baptism and then instructed us in the truths of the Bible from littlest on.

Have you thanked the Lord recently for Christian parents? Have you asked his help to be such a parent – or grandparent -- to the children he has entrusted to you?

While many of us probably cannot relate to the pagan life before coming to faith, we can see what it must be like because we sin daily and we see the hurt and trouble such sin causes. And we realize that, even through we are now believers in Jesus with the best of good intentions, we still *fall short of the glory of God* every day.

II.

Paul now describes WHAT WE HAVE BECOME BECAUSE OF CHRIST. Paul writes to Titus: *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared,*⁵ *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit,*⁶ *whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*⁷ *so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life* (4-7). Moved by his kindness and love, God saved us. He sent the Savior. That Savior did everything for us nearly 2,000 years ago. God no longer holds our sins against us. Through Christ, God JUSTIFIED the world. This means that God, the righteous judge, declared the whole world “innocent and righteous” because the world’s debt has been paid and God’s justice has been satisfied by Jesus’ perfect life and innocent death on the cross.

God justified the world through Christ, and then God brought us to faith so that we receive the full benefit of Christ’s rescue. Imagine yourself enclosed in a small room with no windows, doors, or light of any kind. That was the way we were – spiritually blind – completely in the dark. Now imagine that someone puts a window in – letting the light shine in and permitting us to see out. That’s what God did when he put faith in our heart. Faith is like a window through which God’s light and blessing shine into our lives and through which he permits us to see Jesus and his rescue. We have an example of Christ fulfilling all righteousness for us in today’s Gospel reading. Jesus didn’t need baptism, but God wants us to be baptized, so Jesus insisted on being baptized to perfectly fulfil God’s will for us.

By the way, notice also that windows are not supposed to attract attention to themselves. You’re not supposed to see a window. You are supposed to see what is on the other side. In the same way, our faith is not supposed to attract attention to itself, but is to direct us beyond ourselves to Christ. You see, God didn’t put this window in our heart, so that we could admire

the glass, but so that we could look through it and say: “My help comes for the Lord who saved me through my Savior, Jesus Christ.”

God puts that window, that faith, in us through the Gospel, the Good News message of Jesus and what he has done. God brings that Gospel, which is the power of God for salvation, to us through the Bible. The Bible is not just words. It’s powerful words to produce faith and keep faith alive.

Another tool God uses to bring the Gospel to us is Baptism. Paul calls it *the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit*. Baptism is not just a nice, but meaningless tradition which Christians follow. Baptism is a powerful, a miraculous acting of God. Through baptism God causes a person to be born again – a second time -- as a member of God’s family. God uses baptism to make us new creatures -- Christians – children of God. Rebirth and renewal are both ways to say that through the miracle of baptism the Holy Spirit enters our heart to plant saving faith there. And with faith in Jesus comes forgiveness. Through baptism God washes away all our sins – all sins of the past, present and future. Through baptism God gives us a clear conscience.

Baptism is an amazing tool because through it God works at any age in a person’s life. It is a tool God uses to give faith to the smallest baby, and in this way to spare that child even one year apart from God. And after we are baptized, it is a continuous power source in our lives. The Holy Spirit who entered our heart the day of our baptism stays with us and gives us faith, understanding, strength, comfort as we need them. Our baptism is God’s promise to give us lifelong blessings and to keep us in faith until we arrive in Heaven. Through baptism God has claimed us as his own and is not going to let us go.

When should we be baptized or have our children baptized? The answer is easy: As soon as possible! Whether speaking of ourselves or our children, what good reason is there to delay God’s power? What possible good is there is depriving ourselves or those we love of rebirth, forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit?

III.

Paul says to Titus and us: God has brought you to life in Jesus Christ through Baptism and the Word. NOW LIVE IN THAT NEW LIFE. Paul writes: *This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who believe in God are intent on keeping busy with good works* (8). Our self-image now is that we are a person who is set free from sin and is now living for God.

Consider yourselves dead to sin, Paul said to us at the beginning of this sermon. With our new Christian self-image we simply do not see sin as in any way belonging in our lives, for we are now dead to sin. Joseph of Old Testament fame shows Christian self-image and gives us a good example. When tempted with adultery by Potiphar’s wife, he was outraged: “*How could I do such a great evil and sin against God?*” It’s wrong, lady. How dare you suggest such a thing? I’m a God-fearing man?” Joseph turned and ran out of the house and away from the temptation. He wouldn’t even give thought to the possibility.

We too will encounter temptations to sin. Our world is full of them. But like Joseph, we can flee from such temptation through Christ. We begin to win the battle when we develop a Christian way of looking at sin. When we reckon ourselves dead to sin and therefore grant it no

foothold in our lives. “I am a Christian,” we say, “How could I do such an evil thing, and sin against my beloved Lord? He loved me and died for me to rescue me from sin and its consequences. How can I return to the gutter he has picked me out of? How dare you even suggest it to me?”

In describing the Christian self-image, Paul emphasized the positive side, too. *Consider yourselves... alive to God in Christ Jesus.* The Christian is alive with divine power and in fact has God and his divine power living right inside of him. That power makes the Christian a different and changed person. Instead of arrogantly demanding his rights, he turns the other cheek and goes the second mile. Instead of repaying evil with evil, the Christian loves his enemies and does good to those who treat him badly. Instead of jumping to the worst conclusion, we are asked to put the best possible interpretation on every situation. Instead of flying off the handle, we seek to be peacemakers. Instead of judging our fellow-Christian, we lovingly support the weak in our midst. Instead of selfishly, begrudgingly keeping our money for ourselves, we are willing to sacrifice to help others and spread the gospel.

Faith brings a life lived for God – a life, as Paul says, which *is intent on keeping busy with good works.* It can be no other way for *faith without works is dead.* Just as we look for signs of life on the trees and plants in our yard each spring – and if there’s no sign of life by June, that plant is probably dead – so God looks for signs of life in us. Each act of love, kindness, good that we do – each time we are faithful to our family or our job or our community or our congregation – yes, each God-pleasing act of service is a sign of spiritual life. Being a husband who takes seriously his headship role and responsibility in the family because that is what God desires is a sign of life and a fruit of faith. Being a supportive wife and a loving mother because that pleases God is a sign of life. Being an obedient child, a hard-working employee, a fair-dealing boss, a conscientious church member, a friend in need, a sympathetic listener, a helpful neighbor, a law-abiding citizen, a generous supporter of our congregation – all are signs that you live in God and God lives in you.

Our motivation comes from love for Jesus and thankfulness for what he did to win our salvation. Our power comes through baptism because it was there that the Holy Spirit entered our heart to give us strength to live for God. We have power because God now lives in us so that we bear rich fruit. **THROUGH BAPTISM OUR LORD HAS GIVEN US LIFE.**

And this brings us back to where we started this sermon. How’s your self-image doing these days? It should be doing great for you are a baptized Child of God, living your life in God and for God. Your life matters! Let me repeat that: **YOU ARE A BAPTIZED CHILD OF GOD, LIVING YOUR LIFE IN GOD AND FOR GOD. YOUR LIFE MATTERS!**