

Sermon for The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: July 22, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Genesis 17:1-14

Epistle Reading: Titus 3:3-8

Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

Sermon Text: Matthew 28:19-20

Sermon Title: Good News: Baptism Washes You Clean

Introit: Psalm 51:8-13; Antiphon: Psalm 51:7

Hymns:

LSB 605 – Father Welcomes

LSB 599 – O Gracious Lord, with Love Draw Near

LSB 895 – Now Thank We All Our God

LSB 601 – All Who Believe and Are Baptized



Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



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Grace to you and peace in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is the fifth message in a series of ten sermons that I have put together. This fifth message is called: Good News: Baptism Washes You Clean. Baptism is really just a Greek word that in English means, "apply water." So when you put water on anything you are baptizing it. When you wash your dishes, or your floor, when you water your garden, or wash your hands, you are baptizing them. In the Church we have something called Holy Baptism which is something different.

Perhaps the first question we need to ask is who commands us to Baptize in the Church.

Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you. And remember that I am always with you until the end of time."

Jesus Himself commanded us to give Holy Baptism to all people. Both in the Bible, and in the many other documents we have from that time, we learn that the Church faithfully carried out Jesus' command on people of all ages, from all lands. As I stated earlier baptism means to apply water. There is an odd, but continuing, controversy in the Church about what is the right way to perform a Holy Baptism. Some say you have to pour water, others say you have to totally immerse a person under water. What does the Bible say? Well it doesn't. It is important to remember that the amount of water does not affect God's ability to work through obedience to His command. To obey Jesus' command to Baptize one simply has to use water and the Word of God, as Jesus commanded.

Who can perform Holy Baptism? This is what Scripture says about Pastors:

1 Corinthians 4:1 People should think of us [*pastors*] as servants of Christ, and managers who are entrusted with God's mysteries.

Generally we have a pastor perform the Baptism. This is done for several reasons. For this congregation, you have called me to an honorable office and asked me to shepherd you in the ways God has commanded us to walk. That weighty responsibility has been placed on my shoulders by you through faithful prayer, and by God through His calling to this office. So usually a Baptism is performed as a public event before the entire congregation in the worship service by the pastor. The event is recorded among the official acts of the Church.

Is all of that required according to God's Word? No, but we do it because the Sacraments are supposed to be used to remove doubt and strengthen the faith. By making Holy Baptism a public act, recorded in the Church records, a person who might later wonder if they were really Baptized can go to the Church records and see that they were in fact Baptized in accordance with God's command, and before many witnesses. The same is true with the use of sponsors. Although they are not required they can testify that they were present and did witness that the child was Baptized.

Though generally that is how things are done to maintain good Church order, if the needs arises anyone can perform a Baptism. The Baptism is not better, or more holy, simply because I, your pastor, do the Baptism. A person's faith does not make God's work in Baptism stronger or weaker.

In fact suppose a person serving as pastor in a church is later found out to be a complete fraud. Suppose it is found out that he believes nothing of God's Word, or even in God at all, but merely is working out his years to get to his retirement and be done with all of it. Now you have an atheist

performing Baptisms. (This is an extreme example, but I want to make a point.) Is the Baptism he performs really Holy Baptism?

The answer is absolutely, yes. It is not the faith of the one being Baptized, nor the faith of their family, nor the faith of the pastor that makes Baptism the Sacrament God provides. It is obedience to God's command when water and God's Word are used as God commanded it. The only one who matters in Holy Baptism is God. It is God coming to peruse you. It is God acting on you. It is God instilling in you saving faith.

With that understanding who should we Baptize? Anyone and everyone. All are in need of this flood that washes away our sins. There is no distinction between people before God. All are in need and the gift is offered to all. This does however bring us to another controversy in the Church.

Should babies be Baptized? I personally find this argument odd. Those who would state that Baptism must be done after some "age of accountability" can provide nothing in all of Scripture, or ancient Christian tradition, to back up such a claim. That "age of accountability" is generally put at around age 12, or 18, but there is only one age ascribed to Baptism in the Bible and that is age 30. The age Jesus was when He was baptized. The truth is we have letters from students of the disciples which state that they were baptized as infants by the disciples themselves. The Holy Christian Church has always baptized infants. This new idea that this gift is reserved only for those who can understand it cannot be backed up by Scripture or the recorded acts of the Christian Church throughout history.

Scripture states:

Romans 3:22-23 There is no difference between people. Because all people have sinned, they have fallen short of God's glory

Psalms 51:5 Indeed, I was born guilty. I was a sinner when my mother conceived me.

Acts 2:38-39 Peter said, "All of you must turn to God and change the way you think and act, and each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins will be forgiven. Then you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift. This promise belongs to you and to your children and to everyone who is far away. It belongs to everyone who worships the Lord our God."

Matthew 18:6 [*Jesus said,*] It would be best for the person who causes one of these little ones to lose faith to be drowned in the sea with a large stone hung around his neck.

In Baptism it is God doing the work not us. God does not need anything from us. We need everything from Him. Baptism is one of those means through which God gives us His gifts. What are those gifts?

Galatians 3:26-27 You are all God's children by believing in Christ Jesus. Clearly, all of you who were baptized in Christ's name have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Acts 22:16 What are you waiting for now? Get up! Be baptized, and have your sins washed away as you call on his name.'

Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

Titus 3:4-5 When God our Savior made his kindness and love for humanity appear, he saved us, but not because of anything we had done to gain his approval. Instead,

because of his mercy he saved us through the washing in which the Holy Spirit gives us new birth and renewal.

Baptism is more than just a symbolic act to show your devotion to God. It is an act of God on you through which the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart. It regenerates all who enjoy this sacred act, command by God, creating faith which willingly receives these gifts. Through the faith instilled by Holy Baptism we receive the assurance that salvation is ours by faith. Though this Sacrament we are made children of God and heirs of eternal life. How can water do something so profound? It can't. However obedience to God through the use of water and His Word does do such great things because God has told us it is so.

Is it possible for someone who has not been Baptized to be saved? The short answer is God can do whatever He wants. Jesus Himself said to the criminal hanging next to Him, when:

Luke 23:42-43 The criminal said, "Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom."

Jesus said to him, "I can guarantee this truth: Today you will be with me in paradise."

God can, and will, do whatever God wants to do. God is not under the Law, we are. Where we can obey God's Law we must. To do otherwise is to show disrespect to God. However when matters are beyond our ability to obey His Law, then it becomes God's problem, and He will deal with it as He pleases. What is important here is to be obedient to God's Law and not put God to the test.

Holy Baptism is an important part of the life of every believer. Listen to what the Bible says: Galatians 3:26-29 You are all God's children by believing in Christ Jesus. Clearly, all of you who were baptized in Christ's name have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There are neither Jews nor Greeks, slaves nor free people, males nor females. You are all the same in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants and heirs, as God promised.

Romans 6:4-5 When we were baptized into his death, we were placed into the tomb with him. As Christ was brought back from death to life by the glorious power of the Father, so we, too, should live a new kind of life. If we've become united with him in a death like his, certainly we will also be united with him, when we come back to life, as he did.

This is the wonder of our God. Even though we are stained to the core with sin He still calls us His own. He provides means to wash us and make us clean.¹ He does all of this out of His desperate love and mercy and His desperate desire to call each and every one of us home. Scripture says, "The fool says in his heart there is no God."² Nothing could be more true. How foolish can a person be to have a God who loves him so much and to take that love and toss it away, and with it an eternal life of blessings that cannot be envisioned or fathomed by human imagination.

My charge to you is don't be that fool. Cling to the promises of your God. Hold onto, and obediently feed, that faith God has given you as God has directed you. Do all of this knowing that it is through that free gift of faith that God will rescue you from Satan's clutches and Hell's unending pain.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

1 **Ephesians 5:26-27** – He did this to make the church holy by cleansing it, washing it using water along with spoken words. 27 Then he could present it to himself as a glorious church, without any kind of stain or wrinkle—holy and without faults.

2 Psalm 14:1