

July 22, 2012  
Matthew 28:16-20

Pentecost 8 (Catechetical #4)  
Baptism: Born of Water and the Word

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

We've come to a turning point in our sermon series. Last week we finished the Ancient Catechism, now we move forward as we talk about God's gifts through the Sacraments. This week we venture into the topic of Baptism. There are many in the world that do not truly know what Baptism is all about. Perhaps that is why Luther begins his writing on Baptism in the Large Catechism in this way: "We have now finished with the three chief parts of common Christian teaching. We must say something about our two sacraments, instituted by Christ. For every Christian ought to have at least some brief, elementary instruction about them, because without them no one can be a Christian, although unfortunately nothing was taught about them in the past." Those are pretty strong words...and I hope by the time we are finished you'll understand them and agree.

I like water, I like to swim in it, drink it, I even like water when it refreshes and cleans me. However there is one part of water I don't like...the constant dripping sound from a faucet. There is no way on earth that I could ever attempt to fix a major plumbing issue. I am not a plumber and never will be. If I would crawl underneath a sink to fix drip or a slight leak, I would probably discover or cause more broken pipes...and it would become a bigger issue. I do not like to work with water in that and I don't have that gift either. However I do like to work with water...actually working with water excites me. Part of my vocation and privilege as pastor is to work with the waters of baptism. Several of you have entrusted your children into my arms so that I can baptize them...others have stood beside the font. You know, in Baptism, I'm no better than a plumber.

Unfortunately, there are people out there that think Baptism is something that people do, that it's the work of the pastor or the one being baptized. That is a total misunderstanding of Baptism. If you have this idea about Baptism then you've had a terrible plumber wash your child. Baptism is GOD'S WORK, not our work.

Luther points out: "In the first place, we must above all be familiar with the words upon which baptism is founded and to which everything is related that is to be said on the subject, namely, where the Lord Christ says in the last chapter of Matthew: 'Go Into all the world, teach all the heather, and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'" He also includes the portion from Mark: Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

My dear family of God, the Church did not invent Baptism. It is not a human institution. We should never have any doubt that Baptism is divine. Since it is divine, it is not something that I do or you do. It is something that God does.

Baptism is not a human plaything, although some people look at it that way. Some “regard Baptism,” Luther says, “as an indifferent manner, like putting on a red coat.” He goes on to say that there are many religious groups in the world who argue that “Baptism is an external thing and that external things are of no use.” But Luther reminds us, “What God institutes and commands cannot be useless.” “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God’s own act.”

In these religious groups, there are many people who believe that Baptism is just something we do; that it’s only a symbol; that it’s nice; that it represents something, that it’s something we decide to do on our own, but it’s really not all that important. Often nondenominational Bible studies simply ignore Baptism (or teach the Believer’s baptism) because they know there’s a controversy concerning it. But by ignoring it, we give the impression that it’s unimportant.

Pastor Quardokus shares this in a sermon that he used in Lent. It’s actually his sermon Baptism that backs my thoughts today. He says, “Many years ago when I was a pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Ignace, Ontario, my good friend was the Anglican priest in town. A little girl of his congregation died in an automobile accident. She was only five years old. Our town was so small that we didn’t have a funeral home, and the nearest one was seventy-five miles away. The custom was for the visitation to take place the night before in the church.

It was the middle of winter, and the Anglican church had furnace problems. SO my frined asked if they could use the Lutheran church for the funeral. I said, “Sure, that’ll be fine.”

The evening came and I opened the church and turned on the lights and heat. The funeral director arrived. How sad it was to see a five year old girl in the casket!

Many people began to arrive, as you’d expect when something like this happens in a small community. Then came a woman who was well known in our town. I happened to meet her on the steps as she was leaving the church.

For some reason, she decided this was an appropriate time to debate the theology of Baptism. She had been an Anglican, but then joined a church that denied infant Baptism. She said to me, “You don’t think saying magic words in Baptism over that little girl did anything, did you?”

Can you imagine being confronted in that situation by this woman? But God gave me the presence of mind to say, “No, I don’t believe that saying magic words over that little girl in Baptism did anything. But they were not ‘magic words.’ They were God’s Word! And God’s Word does what he says it will do!”

Pastor Quardokus gave the right words to that woman. Human beings with human eyes may doubt. Human beings may see a poor plumber with a little water dripping, stumbling over his words, and think, What can there be to this?

But most Christians know that it's God who is doing the baptizing. That it's God's Word that has the promise. That it's God Word that accomplishes that which he promises will happen.

Isaiah writes, "For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." That's what God does in Baptism. He does the things he's promised to do.

In the Large Catechism, Luther says, "It is sheer wickedness and devilish blasphemy that now, in order to blaspheme baptism, our new spirits set aside God's Word and ordinance, consider nothing but the water drawn from the well". Today we would say faucet. As I read the Large Catechism and Pastor Quardokus' encounter with the lady at the visitation I wondered...Did Luther meet that lady. But this is what our sinful human thinking does.

Really, why does God give Baptism? IS there actually a purpose to it? Absolutely there is! Luther writes it in this way: "This is the simplest way to put it: the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of baptism...is that it saves!!"

1 Peter writes "Baptism now saves you". That's why God gave it to you, to give you the blessings of salvation won for you by Christ on the cross.

Martin Luther goes on to write, "To be saved, as everyone well knows, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, to enter into Christ's kingdom, and to live with him forever." "Hence it follows that whoever rejects baptism rejects God's Word, faith, and Christ, who directs and binds us to baptism."

Where else in Scripture can you find this besides in 1 Peter 3? Our epistle reading for today speaks on this well. We learned that Baptism gives us victory over death and the devil. Even in Acts 2, Peter says that it gives forgiveness of sins. Titus 3 calls Baptism "the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit." That is what God is done and giving in Baptism.

People become confused and think that faith makes Baptism. Therefore, they think a baby must have faith before it's baptized; otherwise, the Baptism couldn't be valid. The other implication would be that any of our Baptisms might be invalid if our faith were too weak.

Imagine if that were true. Let me ask you this, Does your faith make Jesus? If you don't believe, does it mean that Jesus didn't die on the cross for the sins of the world? No, your faith has nothing to do with the objective reality of what God did in Christ.

Jesus is real! He really died on the cross for the sins of the entire world. John the Baptist declared, he is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" My faith doesn't make that true, my lack of faith can't change it. But if I reject it, then it's not mine. It's like putting up an umbrella and saying, "I don't want any of God's forgiveness raining on me!" It's still there; it's still real. So also Baptism is real and valid. But if a person doesn't have faith...actually if a person rejects it, it doesn't change Baptism. It just changes the result.

You may have had a wedding day. If someone were to ask you if you are married, you might respond...I was married on a certain date. For me it was February 14, 2009.

But if I were to answer: I was married," what would you hear? "But I'm not anymore?" If you really are married, you would say, I am married. That was a wonderful day on Feb. 14, 2009. But there have been many wonderful days since then that I want to acknowledge. I not only was married, but I am married. That's how we are to think of Baptism. Not that I was baptized, then fell into sin, and now something came along so that I'm not baptized any longer. Christians answer, "I am baptized." I was baptized on Oct. 30, 1983, and I still am Baptized TODAY! Years down the road little Madelyn will be able to say...I was baptized on July 22, 2012 and I AM Still baptized today!!

Every time you come to the Lord in repentance, kneel before His cross, and seek forgiveness, you are returning to your Baptism. Luther says, "Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to baptism, to resume and practice what has earlier been begun but abandoned." Let this be of value to you every day. The blessing of being a baptized person is a comfort to your soul. When the devil says to you, "How can such a rotten scoundrel call himself a Christian?" You answer, "Because I am baptized and I am forgiven. I have been washed clean of my sin and have Christ's robe of righteousness placed on me."

"If we have received forgiveness of sin once in baptism, Luther says, "It will remain day by day as long as we live."

Baptism grants us forgiveness, life and salvation to everyone even the tiny little baby. I remember my wedding day, I know the date of my baptism. There is a day that I now long for...the birth of my child and also the second birth when I hold our tiny child in my arms and I fulfill Christ's command again sprinkling water and saying...I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. There that child will be sealed with Christ's name and given forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In Jesus name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*