

Baptism-- What's the point?

Sermon 2- Baptism and Union with Christ

Passages: 1 Cor. 10:1-4
Mark 10:35-40

In just a few weeks, 12 people from our church are going to be baptized. It will be a wonderful occasion! But, the question is, do we really understand the importance of this sacrament? I'm afraid not!

That's why I thought it would be really helpful for us to do a short series of 6 sermons on the topic. Each week, we'll explore a different aspect of baptism so that we can better appreciate what the ceremony on Feb 12th is really all about.

Today, I want to look at the word 'baptism'. As we will see in today's passages, it's a word that can be used in different ways. I want to show you that, behind the action of dunking a person in water is a very important theological concept—the concept of union with Christ.

Let's pray.

In both of our passages for today, we find the word 'baptism'. But the word is used in a way that is quite different to what we might expect.

In Mark 10:37, Jesus is asked by James and John if they can sit at the right and left hands of Jesus when He comes in His glory. In other words, they have visions of grandeur—they see themselves as being closer and more important to Jesus than the other disciples.

Now, I really don't want to discuss their request, as absurd as it was. What I want us to look at is Jesus' reply. In verse 38, Jesus says to them, "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" That's three times in one sentence! But what does Jesus mean?

You see, in Greek, the verb "to baptize" ('baptizo') normally means "to dip, plunge, immerse, dunk or wash". In many cases, it is used in the passive sense—something is dipped, plunged, immersed or washed.

But baptism can also be used in a **figurative sense**, as in today's passages. In these cases, it can have the sense of "being

overwhelmed”. And so, by using the word three times, Jesus is asking these two impertinent disciples a very difficult question—“Can you tolerate being overwhelmed... immersed...dunked... plunged... held under the water of my sufferings?

Do you see? Jesus is deliberately using the word ‘baptism’ to describe **joining Him...becoming one with Him... in His sufferings!** “Can you be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” “Will you be able to tolerate the overwhelming suffering that I will soon be going through?” Curiously, both James and John said, “**We can!**” And so, Jesus said to them, “**You will drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with...**”

And that’s exactly what happened! According to history, James experienced martyrdom and John experienced exile. By faith, they followed Jesus into His baptism, to be overwhelmed by His sufferings! By faith, they accepted their immersion, to be plunged into the deep waters of union with Jesus... not just union with His glory, but union with His sufferings.

Now, why is all this important for us to talk about in regards to the ceremony of baptism coming up on February 12th? Because the 15 candidates who are getting baptized on that day are being called into Jesus’ baptism-- into **union with Jesus!** And union with Jesus is not just about getting wet! As Bonhoeffer said in his book, **The Cost of Discipleship**, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” In other words, we are called to be so united with Jesus that we accept that the things that were done to Him may be done to us. The rejection that He faced is the rejection that we may also face.

Jesus said it! “**No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.**” That is the union that Bonhoeffer is also talking about.

The Apostle Paul says exactly the same thing in Romans 6, in direct connection with baptism! Romans 6:3 “**Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Jesus were baptized into his death?**”

But, of course, that’s not the whole story! Although we must continually die with Jesus in the sense of joining Him in the sufferings and the rejection that He faced, at the same time, there is the joy of new life! Paul says this too in Romans 6, verse 5. “**If we have been united with Him in the likeness of His death, we will certainly also**

be united with him in his resurrection!” (And, of course, this means that we are united with all three Persons of the Trinity!)

What we are seeing today is very important-- The word ‘baptism’ is not only used literally to describe getting dunked in water. In fact, that’s only a small part of what is going on. More importantly, ‘baptism’ is a theological concept that has to do with faith, and union, and perseverance, and a willingness to go with Jesus wherever He leads.

Sadly, however, far too many people get baptized without any desire to accept the bad with the good. They get baptized because they see some advantage—maybe they think baptism will save them, or get them more friends, or help them get better grades, or somehow make their relatives happy. Their eyes are on what they can get from it!

But the truth of baptism is union. Yes, there are many benefits from baptism... particularly a greater sense peace and union with God. But you have to take the good with the bad! Jesus bids us to be united with Him in baptism... for good and for ill.

It’s kind of like a marriage, really! I mean, when I got married to Kim, we made vows in which we said “For better or worse!” There are so many benefits to being married to her...but marriage also means serving her, and suffering with her and for her!

When we go down in the waters of baptism, a type of marriage ceremony is taking place.

- Jesus is the bridegroom and we are the bride.
- Jesus is inviting us to come to Him, and we are simply accepting His invitation.
- Jesus is asking us the question, “Do you love me?” and we, by entering the water, are saying ‘Yes!’
- The deeper we go into the water, the more we know we are called to trust Him with our lives.
- As we fully submit to the water (as it covers us and as we come out again), we are saying to Jesus, “I am dead in your arms but, in your love, you have caused me to live again!”
- As we come up out of the water, even our name has been changed. From now on, we bear the name of Christ. We call ourselves ‘Christians’—the Christ followers!

- In baptism, we are united to Christ...a wedding ceremony of sorts.

One final question, however, comes out of this idea. You see, a lot of people think that, once you've been baptized it's all good—you've made it! You are now a Christian. The idea is that the one-off event of being baptized means that this union with Christ can never be undone. **But, I don't think so!** Turn with me to our second passage for today-- **1 Corinthians 10, verses 1-4.**

Notice that Paul uses the word 'baptism' in this passage, even though he's talking about Moses. As we saw in Mark 10, it's obvious that Paul is using the word in a figurative sense when he says, in verse 2, that the people of Israel "...were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea". Figuratively speaking, the people of Israel were **united** to Moses. They were **in union** with Moses. How? Simply by following him through the Red Sea. Verse 1 says, "**They were all under the cloud with him**"-- Paul's referring to "the pillar of fire by night and the cloud of smoke by day", remember?—"and they all passed through the sea with him". Then, in verse 2, Paul makes a link between the cloud (water vapour?) and the water of the Red Sea to baptism. "**They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea.**"

As I said, all this is figurative language! There wasn't any official baptism ceremony! In fact, what I find fascinating here is how, in verses 3 and 4, Paul switches from a baptism metaphor to a metaphor about the Lord's Supper. Suddenly he moves from water to talking about "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink"!

But the general point Paul is making here is all about **union**. He's telling the Christians in Corinth that the people in the Old Testament were **united** with Moses as they followed him through the waters. They were **united** with Moses as they ate and drank with him in the desert. And yet, **if that union is not maintained, it's worth nothing!**

Look at verse 5! "**Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.**" Indeed, Paul goes on in verse 6 to say, "**Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.**"

What's Paul's point here? Obviously, you can be united with Christ in the events of baptism and the Lord's Supper...at least temporarily...

but neither of these things will make any difference if you are not truly pursuing that relationship on a full-time basis! Obviously, there were people in Corinth who had been baptized and who were taking the Lord's Supper **but** who were making a mockery out of these two sacraments. Like the Israelites who were baptized into Moses in the Red Sea and who had eaten spiritual food with him on Mt Sinai, by playing around with false idols and engaging in false worship they were denying the things they said they believed!

The point is that neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper make you into a Christian. Rather, they are both living metaphors (much like a wedding ceremony) that speak about **union with Jesus!** In the same way that a good wedding ceremony doesn't mean that you will have a solid and growing marriage, the ritual of baptism doesn't guarantee you will be a good Christian. Baptism is the initial step of being **overwhelmed, immersed, drowned, saturated, washed** in His love and by his grace. But you must continue in that baptism every day of your life if you really want to see your relationship with Jesus deepen and grow.

For those getting baptized in the Georges' River on Feb 12th, your baptism speaks of your union/ your marriage to Son of God who calls you to come in the water and die with Him and be raised to new life in Him. It is all about a relationship with Jesus... a deep, ongoing relationship with Jesus... a relationship that must be nurtured and maintained throughout the rest of your life...just like a marriage!

On February 12th, 15 people will be taking this concept very seriously as they step into the waters of Jesus' baptism.

Let's pray.