



*feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)*

Dear Church Family,

What a wonderful Sunday service we enjoyed, celebrating salvation in Baptism and Communion! I highlighted two key aspects of baptism that the New Testament teaches that we need to recover and be reminded of in our day.

First, baptism is a bath where our sins are washed away. We are cleaned up to be in God's presence. We no longer need to react like Isiah in Isiah 6, "*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*" Or like Peter in Luke 5, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" That is a huge blessing. We are in danger of underappreciating the significance of what it means to have our sins washed away because God's holiness and our sinfulness are not popular topics in modern day Christianity. But it is precisely the awareness of God's holiness and our sin that deepens our experience of God's love. It is this combination that Tim Keller explains, "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." And it is the deep appreciation for the forgiveness of our sins in Christ that fuels our love and devotion to Christ. Conversely, if we have a diminished view of our sinfulness, our love and devotion to Christ is weakened. Luke 7:47 "*he who is forgiven little, loves little.*" So we do not need to hide our flaws and faults in shame. We are free to face them and rejoice that they no longer have the ability to define us before God. Instead our baptism means that we put on Christ and have Him as our identity. "*For in Christ Jesus you are all sons and daughters of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Gal 3:26-7).

Baptism is also a burial as explained in Romans 6. "*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*" Baptism is an identification with Christ's burial and resurrection. In His death, we die to sin and in His resurrection we live a new life. The new life we live is to please Him and not ourselves. And to be able to do that, our sinful nature which lives to please ourselves rather than God must be put to death. This work is not complete at baptism. After baptism we still have the ability to sin and choose to please ourselves instead of God. We need to resist the temptation to sin and with the help of the Holy Spirit do our best to act like we are dead to sin. This is a significant commitment that we are making when we choose to be baptized. We are committing to a life where we will take up our cross and put our own welfare to death if that is the path that is pleasing to God. This is the path that Jesus walked and He clearly taught that this would be a part of discipleship for all believers.

We need to be reminded of this in our day when the gospel is too often taught, embraced, and understood as that which will bring us fulfillment in this life. The message of the cross is ignored because it is not seen as good news. But it is good news of victory for the disciple who longs to live a life that is pleasing to God. Yes, we are in a battle with sin while we are in our fleshly bodies,

but in baptism we know that Christ has won the victory for us in that battle. This is good news in our current struggle. Especially when we have stumbled, we can confess our sin, receive forgiveness and know that ultimate victory is ours. So we are not discouraged by failure, but rather encouraged to keep fighting to live out our salvation and bring glory to God.

And the joy of Sunday is that we not only were able to celebrate these gospel truths with those who were being baptized, we were also able to celebrate them in communion. All of this is accomplished by the finished work of Christ on our behalf. He is indeed worthy of all praise!

Pastorally Yours,  
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