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Baptism Matters
July 5th, 2015, Pastor Jeff Germo

We're going to talk about baptism today. It's a very important beginning in the life of a disciple of Jesus, but in Western Christianity we take the ordinance of baptism very lightly. Here's a cartoon to illustrate that. It says,

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"Onlookers were amazed when it took escape artist Dave only 15 minutes to escape his baptism."

There is a huge difference between how we in Canada and the United States view baptism, and how the rest of the world sees it.

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When we were in Japan we saw new believers get baptized, who did so at the fear of being disowned by their families. There was a definite "line drawn in the sand" that signified that the person was choosing to follow Jesus from that day forward, and many times there were some dire consequences.

This is what it's like in many other countries. There is no such thing there as a half-hearted or lukewarm Christian. They know when they choose to follow Jesus there is a good possibility that there will be a significant price to pay, so they don't make those decisions lightly.

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As Chuck Colson points out:

"Most Westerners take baptism for granted, but for many in the world the act requires immense courage. In countries like Nepal it once meant imprisonment. For Soviet or Chinese or Eastern bloc believers, it was like signing their own death warrant."¹

If you live in a culture like that, baptism has much more significance than we give it here, but it should really carry the same weight as it does in those places where Christians are persecuted. Baptism says, "This is the line, I am no longer the old me, and I publicly commit to following Jesus in the body of Christ for the rest of my days." The only difference between baptism in Canada and some of those places is that we don't pay the same price as they do.

In the 1500s the Anabaptists in Europe protested against the abuses of the state church by not letting their infants be baptized, and by being re-baptized themselves as believing adults. What the Catholic and Lutheran churches were doing at that time was using infant baptism as a form of census taking. Infant baptism was mandated by the state, so, depending on where you lived, you would either be a Lutheran or a Catholic. You were born into your faith. The Anabaptists saw that this was not scriptural so they protested against it – for which they paid a heavy price.

I want to read an old account for you of the illegal church meeting that gave birth to the Anabaptist movement. It took place on Jan. 21, 1525, in the home of Felix Manz in the city of Zurich. The City Council had forbidden the group to meet or they would suffer consequences. The decision they took to follow their conscience and defy the state church would ultimately cost all of them their lives.

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¹ "The Body: Being Light In Darkness" by Charles Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, 1992, Word Publishing, page 137

“And it came to pass that they were together until a dread began to come over them, yea, they were pressed in their hearts. Thereupon, they began to bow their knees to the Most High God in heaven and called upon him as the Knower of hearts, implored him to enable them to do his divine will and to manifest his mercy toward them...”

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After the prayer, George Cajacob arose and asked Conrad [Grebel] to baptize him, for the sake of God, with the true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. And when he knelt down with that request and desire, Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no ordained deacon to perform such work.

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After that was done the others similarly desired George to baptize them, which he also did upon their request. Each confirmed the other in the service of the gospel, and they began to teach and keep the faith.”²

Subsequent to this, thousands of men and women were killed for their beliefs. Many of them were burned alive. One of the favourite ways for punishing Anabaptists was with what was jokingly called "the third baptism." They had been baptized as infants, and then re-baptized as believing adults, and finally, the state church thought it would be appropriately ironic to baptize them a third time by tying weights to their feet and tossing them into rivers or lakes to drown.

That was about five centuries ago, but there are still many people around the world today who risk their lives when they choose to follow the command of Jesus to be baptized. They know true discipleship means following Jesus' command to be baptized even if there are dire consequences. But, that is difficult for us to understand in Canada isn't it? It's too easy for us here.

This morning we want to take a good look at Baptism. We are going to discuss what it is, why it's important and who should be baptized.

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So, first of all, **what is baptism about?**

For those of you who are married, you likely wear a wedding ring which means that you are spoken for. It is a symbol or a sign that you are no longer on the prowl, because you are joined by a covenant with your spouse that you will commit and be faithful to him or her till death do you part. There is no magic or power in the ring, but it is a very rich symbol.

Baptism is likewise a very poignantly rich symbol. There is no magic or power in baptism. It is not regenerative – that is, it does not give you new life or save you. It is an outward expression of an inward reality. When you received Christ as your saviour something happened in your spiritual heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. The old you died, and the new you, in Christ, was raised to life. **That is called regeneration.** So, baptism is actually a spiritual funeral, with a bit of a twist because not only does baptism symbolize a burial, it also symbolizes a resurrection. Let's take a look at a few scripture texts that illustrate this.

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Romans 6:1–4 (ESV)

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been

² <http://www.hccentral.com/gkeys/ccult.html>

baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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.

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Colossians 2:12 (ESV)

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

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Galatians 3:26–27 (ESV)

²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

So, Paul is not saying that through the act of baptism you put Christ on.

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He is saying that putting on Christ, or being “clothed with Christ” as some translations say, is something that has already happened prior to your baptism through your faith in Christ. Your baptism is a public declaration that your sins have been washed away through Christ’s death, that you have been raised to new life by the power of His resurrection, and finally that you have chosen to follow Christ forever. You are saying, publicly, to God, the church, the world, and even to Satan, that God has done a work in your heart. The old you is dead, and you are choosing to live your life God’s way by following Jesus in obedience.

Years ago, a machinist at Ford Motor Company in Detroit became a Christian and was baptized. He took his baptism very seriously. He had been stealing parts and tools from Ford for years. The morning after his baptism he took all the stolen parts and tools back to his boss. He explained his situation and his recent conversion and baptism, and asked for forgiveness. This was the first time the Ford Company had ever seen anything like this. Mr. Ford was visiting a European plant at the time, but he was cabled concerning what had happened and was asked what they should do about it. Mr. Ford immediately returned a cable with his decision: "Dam up the Detroit River, and baptize the entire city."

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Now, let’s talk a bit about the **mode of baptism** that we as Baptists practice. Why do we choose to use **full immersion**? I was born into the Lutheran Church and was baptized as an infant. Some of you may have had a similar experience either in a Catholic church or in some other church that practiced this mode of baptism. Or maybe you were baptized as an adult in a church that used a different form of baptism than immersion, such as sprinkling or pouring, and I know it can be an emotional topic for you because your experience was real to you. And I don’t want to take anything from that. But, just be patient with me while I explain why, as Baptists, we use full immersion.

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The **first reason** is the meaning of the Greek word *baptizō*. It means “to dip under.” The word wasn’t just used for the ritual of baptism. It was also used of the blacksmith tempering red-hot steel by dipping it in water. It meant also “to fill by dipping in, to draw” like you would with a soup ladle, or a bucket in a lake. The meaning of the word is always “to fully submerge”.

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The **second reason** that we baptize by immersion is because it was practiced in the New Testament, and there is no evidence of any other kind of baptism in the Bible.

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Mark 1:4–10 (ESV)

This is the time when Jesus went to his cousin John the Baptist to get baptized.

4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

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6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

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9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

So, Jesus was very obviously fully submerged in the Jordan, since he came up out of the water.

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Also, we can see in **John 3:23** that John chose the location where he would baptize based on how much water there was. It says that he was baptizing at Aenon because ***"there was plenty of water"***, which seems to indicate that there needed to be enough to fully submerge the person being baptized.

Acts 8:36-39 also seems to indicate full immersion.

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This is the occasion when Philip, has a divine appointment with an Ethiopian sitting in his chariot reading from the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit of God told Philip to go the man. Have you ever had God set up a divine appointment like that for you? You felt a very strong impression in your spirit that you were supposed to talk to someone, or minister to them in some way? Did you obey? Well Philip did. He asked the man what he was reading, and if he needed help understanding, and then he subsequently led him to faith in Christ as the risen Messiah through the Old Testament Scriptures he had been reading. So, then, it looks like Philip hitched a ride in the Ethiopian's chariot. The story continues in verse 36.

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Acts 8:36–39 (ESV)

36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water...

So, again, it seems very clear that Philip baptized the Ethiopian by full immersion.

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So, we baptize by immersion, because **it is what the word means**, and because this is what **was practiced in the New Testament**.

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Another reason that we baptize by immersion is because of the rich **symbolism** of union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection reflected in Romans 6 which we looked at earlier.

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Romans 6:1–4 (ESV)

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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.

Do you see that symbolism? So, that is why we baptize by immersion.

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Why should we be baptized?

1. **Jesus was baptized.** (Mark 1:4-10; Matthew 3:13-17).

We already looked at the Mark passage where Jesus was baptized by John, so we won't do it again, but Jesus is our example that our lives are to reflect and he was baptized, so we too should be baptized.

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2. **Jesus commanded that we be baptized.** (Matthew 28:19).

This is the mission that Jesus gave us. After he rose from the dead, the last thing he said to his disciples was this:

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Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸ ...“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Jesus commanded us to make disciples. It is what the church is to be about, and baptism is a part of that mission, which means that discipleship is not complete without it.

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3. **The apostles commanded it.** (Acts 2:38).

This was just subsequent to Pentecost after Peter preached his amazing sermon and 3000 people believed.

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Acts 2:38 (ESV)

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So, the disciples carried on with this mandate after Christ commanded that all believers be baptized.

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4. **The example of the early church** (Acts 2:41; Acts 8:36-39; Acts 9:18; Acts 10:47 etc).

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Acts 2:38–41 (ESV)

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

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Acts 10:47–48 (ESV)

⁴⁷“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Friends, baptism is not optional for Christians. It is an act that God requires of every single believer. As a matter of fact, Jesus' call to believe on him in Mark 16:16 includes a call to be baptized. You never read of an unbaptized Christian anywhere in the Bible. In fact, baptism immediately followed a person's salvation. They didn't see it as something to be delayed or put off.

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Who should be baptized?

In the New Testament the only people who were baptized were those who had believed and trusted in Jesus' finished work on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins, and had repented. **Belief and repentance always came before baptism.** We've already looked at passages where Jesus, John, and the apostles preached that we should repent and be baptized, which is why we do not baptize infants. A baby, as sweet as they are, cannot repent, believe, or understand the gospel.

I was born into a Lutheran home and was subsequently baptized. I did not ask my parents to baptize me. I was only a few weeks old, so I have no recollection of the rite that took place. Just a few years later my father came to faith in Christ and we became members of a church that practiced believer's baptism, and as a young teenager I gave my life to Christ and was baptized by immersion as a believer.

There may be some of you here in the same boat that I was in and you are wrestling in your hearts over whether or not you should get baptized. You know what? You have absolutely nothing to lose, and everything to gain by following Jesus in water baptism.

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Ultimately, it all goes back to Jesus' statement in **John 14:15.**

"If you love me, keep my commandments." Baptism is a simple, but profound act of obedience that you will carry with you for the rest of your life. If you have not yet taken this step, I strongly encourage you to do so as soon as possible.

Of course, baptism without recognizing and embracing the reason for it is simply getting wet. Baptism speaks to your heart's affections, just like the ring does in a marriage. It says, "My heart is for Christ, and I am going to publicly commit to follow him the rest of my days. It doesn't mean that you will never fall, because you will. But, it means that you are relying on Jesus and his righteousness and will endeavour to move towards the heart of God for the rest of your life.

In the book, *Stories for the Soul*, Raymond McHenry tells of an experience of a short-term missionary to East Malaysia.

“While there he attended a small church. At one of the church’s worship services, a teenage girl came forward to announce her decision to follow Christ and be baptized. During the service, Denison, the missionary, noticed some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall of the church building. He asked the pastor about it. The pastor pointed to the girl who had just been baptized and told Denison, ‘Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage.’”³

Friends, choosing to follow Jesus is so easy for us in Canada, relative to the majority of the world. Jesus calls us to take a step of faith and publicly declare our allegiance to him. We are going to have a baptism service in August. If you have not been baptized yet why not talk to me or to one of the other staff about it. Some people don’t want to get baptized simply because they are afraid of speaking in public. If that’s you, don’t be afraid. Write out your story and let someone else read it, or simply nod your head when you are asked if you have placed your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Don’t let fear hold you back from being obedient to Jesus, friend. You will be glad you took the step of faith.

³ Raymond McHenry, *Stories for the Soul* (Hendrickson, 2001), p. 48;