

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Listen to how Luther describes baptism: "For [God] desired that by [baptism] little children, who were incapable of greed and superstition, might be initiated and sanctified in the simple faith of his word; even today Baptism has its chief blessing for them."<sup>1</sup> I like reading these kinds of quotes from Luther because you really get to see Pastor Martin Luther and not some old curmudgeon.

He loved children and he loved the church. He loved the people he served and I think that is why he risked his life to challenge the theology of the time because he knew a theology based in the law could never save. He wasn't going to let his little children suffer in fear as he once did.

Our lesson today/tonight from Romans 6 is heard a great deal at funerals. In fact, it is used in our funeral liturgy in the very beginning of the rite under the section - Thanksgiving for Baptism:

When we were baptized in Christ Jesus,  
we were baptized into his death.

We were buried therefore with him  
by baptism into death,  
so that as Christ was raised from the dead  
by the glory of the Father,  
we too might live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his,  
we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

The reason we do this is because baptism is what links us to Christ. Wengert says, "God links our destiny to that of Jesus Christ." We believe that "in baptism, Christ himself baptize and joins us us to his death" and in turn, links us to his resurrection.<sup>2</sup> You can't have death without resurrection. That is what we remind people of at a funeral. It is why we use a Pall during a funeral as a physical reminder of the baptism gown that person once wore on the day of their baptism and wore daily as a Christian.

St. Paul writes in Galatians 3: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Baptism for Paul was like putting on a shirt and wearing Christ - you cannot get away from Jesus. Even when the Romans would strip you of your clothes and hang you on a cross, Jesus would be with you. Even when the Nazis would haul you away, strip you of your clothes and throw you into a gas chamber, Jesus would be with you. Even when you go off to college and get into a little trouble or want to explore life's greatest questions, Jesus would be with you. Even when you lie on your death bed, stripped of your clothes and wearing a very thin hospital gown, Jesus would be with you.

Baptism is the great equalizer both socially and spiritually. St. Paul would go onto say in the very next verse, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Because we all wear the same clothing, you can't tell I am a Jew or a Greek, black or white, rich or poor. Since you look like Christ and I look like Christ, our differences must be put to the side and we focus on what really matters - our faith in Christ Jesus.

And spiritually, Baptism becomes the great equalizer of Christians. Wengert calls the baptism "the sacrament of justification par excellence."<sup>3</sup> You all have become pretty good Lutheran scholars over these past few weeks. What, according to Luther, separates us from God? **Sin**. Therefore, we need Jesus to make us right with God.

We call this Atonement theology. This is what Luther had to work with at his finger tips. Atonement theology teaches that Jesus was the sacrificial lamb who died on our behalf. None of our sacrifices were good enough; the only way to satisfy the debt was for God to pay it for us. Baptism then, put Christ in us and on us so that when God looks at us, he only can see his son. You are all now experts in Atonement theology (Congratulations...I think).

So you all see the link between baptism and justification? Jesus justifies us. Baptism brings us into relationship with God; washes away that original sin. So, when we talk about Justification by grace through faith and someone asks you, “What does this look like?” Your answer is baptism. Justification looks like baptism. Justification that only Jesus could do for us. Justification because our works are not good enough. For Luther, Baptism was not our work, but a work of God. His opponents, though, argued the opposite. Using the same passage of scripture, Mark 16, Zwingli and the Anabaptist argued that one needed belief in order to be baptized. “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved;” They argued that a baptism is worthless without the faith component. One could say, Baptism is not special enough without the faith.

But you see, here’s the thing. Open up your catechisms to the section on Baptism. Luther asks:

**What is baptism?**

*Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead, it is water used according to God’s command and connected with God’s word. Baptism is not just a bath. It is something we do because God said to do so.*

**What then is this word of God?**

*Where our Lord Christ says in Matthew 28, “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.”*

Not just a bath. Water infused with God's word, given to us through God's command. Do you see anywhere in this command that says, “Baptize only those 13 and over? Baptize only those who can answer for themselves? Jesus says to make disciples of ALL nations by baptizing them. That is how you make disciples.

Luther uses this analogy: “A baptized child was a like a woman who had married without love. If five years later she fell in love, there was no reason to retie the knot. Nothing could thwart God’s good’s promise: Let the children come...For my faith does not make baptism; rather, it receives baptism. Baptism does not become invalid if it not properly received or used, for it is not bound to our faith but to the Word.”<sup>4</sup> This means, my brothers and sisters, “even if infants [do] not believe, this would not invalidate baptism. One builds baptism not on faith—even the faith of the gather community—but on God’s word and command.” Essentially, Luther argued that when we make baptism about our own faith, we make it a work (and you know how Luther feels about works). When we make baptism about God’s work, it no longer depends on our faith but on the faith of Jesus to make good on his promises.

So what does this mean for us today? I think it means two things. One should not get baptized because it is a rite of passage. Rather, one should get baptized because of the command from God - you want to be a disciple, you need to be baptized. Two, pastors should not turn candidates away because they are afraid the parents will not make good on their promises. Baptism is not about us or our works, it is about God works.

But we are not just pawns in God's divine puppet show. We do have a role. Remember that fourth commandment? It does not just involve the kids roles...parents have obligations here too. Luther believed that it was the role of parents (and governments and churches too) to provide education programs and schools so that children “can fight the devil.” Luther’s announcement for his 1528 Sermon on the Catechism read, “Given them an hour off that they may come to know themselves and Christ more fully.” So while baptism, for Luther, meant that we were brought into relationship with God, we also gain the devil as our enemy. The devil will do whatever he can to pull us away from the promises made to us in our baptism. Education, the proper teaching of the faith - which can only be done by the church and not the government I should add, is how we make sure our children will have faith and we have faith as well.

I think the Lutheran church has made significant strides over the past 20-30 years to reaffirm the importance of the sacraments in our congregations. We have stopped doing private baptisms. We have moved towards more appreciation of the Eucharist but more on that next week. “We must remember that

baptism is not a mere sign that points to something else, an allegory but it is the real thing; justification itself.”<sup>5</sup>

If we are going to be the church that continues to proclaim Justification by Grace through Faith then we must also proclaim the importance of Baptism - that it is God’s command that all disciples be baptized so that we might be drawn closer together as the church and have that sin, which separates us from God, removed by God. Baptism is not a human work but a work of God. “Baptism is sheer grace and treasure, a splendid antidote for a work-happy (or rather, a work-infested) church.”<sup>6</sup>

When your pastor, another christian, or St. Peter himself gets up and asks you, “what have you done for Jesus?” You respond, “Nothing. Jesus has done it all for me.”

As Luther once said, “Now here in baptism there is brought, free of charge, to every person’s door just such a treasure and medicine that swallows up death and keeps all people alive... No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than baptism, for through it we become completely holy and blessed, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 100.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 100.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 101.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 102.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 113.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 113.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 114 - 115.