

We can read about the mighty actions of the Holy Spirit on the very first Pentecost. Yes, there had to be Pentecost, and with it the Church could be inaugurated. But first, the new believers had to be Baptized. What is it about this act of Baptism which was so essential? What is it about Baptism that made it the starting point for the early Church, and still marks even today the starting point for the new Christian? What is so special about these waters?

The Bible tells us that in the beginning God's Spirit hovered over the surface of deep water (Gen. 1:2). And at His command, the dry land rose out of that water. (Gen. 1:9). Land, the platform for so much earthly life gained a kind of victory over the water. God's natural order, land – the platform for His creativity – was freed from water, the chaos of non-existence (Schmemmann 72).

Later in Genesis, Scripture states that "every inclination of the thoughts of [man's] heart [had become] only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). So God decided to start over. How? Noah, a faithful man together with his family was brought under God's protection, and then The Lord released the chaos of **re-creation** on the earth, once more in the form of water.

And how did God lead the Israelites to freedom? God freed his children from bondage in Egypt by dividing, yet again, the chaos of water from the land which provided the Israelites their path to freedom across the Red Sea. (Ex. 13:17-14:31). And it is this freedom, yet a new kind of freedom that we celebrate too today in water. The water of Baptism marks the assurance, as Paul so rightly proclaims this morning in *Romans*, that we have been set free in Christ Jesus from nothing less than sin and death itself. (See Rom.8:2)

And just as water is the starting point for creation and re-creation, so Baptism is the starting point for the new man or the new woman in Christ, for there is a newness of life rendered possible only for the Baptized Christian (Rom. 6:4). With Baptism, each and every one of us is provided the opportunity to flourish in the good soil of the Word that you heard about in the Gospel this morning, that good soil of The Word, sewn through our faithfulness to our Baptismal promises, to set and keep our feet firmly planted in the rich, fertile furrow which is the Word of God, *The Word*, Jesus, in whose name these newest members of our family will be Baptized in a few moments.

We know that water is also the very stuff of life, for no life is possible without it. When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, He caused a stream of water to miraculously materialize for them out of rock (Exodus 14:15-26). And so the life of Israel was preserved.

Jesus promises a well-spring of life too. In fact, He promises a life without end for God's people. In John chapter 4, we read that He assured the Samaritan woman at the well near Shechem, telling her that all who come to Him will possess "a spring of water welling up into eternal life" (John 4:14b). This is exactly what we proclaim here today as we perform the Sacrament of Baptism. Our faith sees this sacred act as reclaiming Christ's promise of everlasting life (Stevenson 132). And this is a different kind of life from our earthly existence, a life which is fuller, richer, and more satisfying. For Jesus says, "everyone who drinks of [earthly] water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water I give him will never thirst" (John 4:13).

This different kind of life from our earthly existence, this fuller, richer life means that we come to recognize the Spiritual realm of our nature. When he came to talk with Jesus secretly, by night Nicodemus could not understand that we are both physical and Spiritual beings; he could not grasp that we must be born again, from above, of both water and the Spirit (John 3:1-8). Nicodemus needed to see, just as we do, that we must be commissioned to both an earthly and a Spiritual life if we are to become one of God's citizens. We must acknowledge and inaugurate this state and accept the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives if we are to be Christians. In short, we must be Baptized.

It is important to understand that the Spiritual and physical components of that marvelous creation of the human being are inseparable. And this is exactly what so many of the Anglican reformers understood about the Sacrament which we will perform in a moment. The physical Baptism of the water and the Spiritual Baptism of the Holy Spirit are integral parts of the same process. In fact, the waters in

that font signify nothing less than the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the new Christian (Stevenson 149).

With Baptism, we renounce the artificial and sinful barrier that the Evil One and this world craft to separate our physical and spiritual identities. With Baptism we breach that perimeter, we demolish that false wall which stands between our two essential humanities – the Spiritual and the physical. Because of Jesus and the Great Comforter that issues forth from Christ's blessed atonement on the Cross, the old divided and sinful man is buried in the waters of Baptism and we are raised with Christ into the new humanity which God intended for his children (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12).

And in the person of this new being, we come to truly recognize with wonder that, just as the Psalmist said this morning, God's truth is our heritage forever, and have truly become the joy of our heart (See Ps. 119:111)

On the day of Pentecost we read that 3,000 people were Baptized (Acts 2:41). It is significant that what marks the beginning of the early church should be a corporate execution of the Sacrament, a Baptism *en masse*. This is because Baptism is not something which we do for a specific individual alone. It is a proclamation of our faith too (Stevenson 83-84). Baptism is a corporate recommitting of us all to the way of the Cross.

And this Sacrament of Baptism is marvelously demonstrative of this corporate dimension. When properly lived, infants who are Baptized grow to build a life with the serious understanding that they have the obligation to make-good on the vows lovingly pronounced by their Godparents, parents, and this congregation (Stevenson 75-76). And the Godparents themselves have a clearly stated obligation to the child. The only way for all parties to the Baptismal covenant to properly uphold their promises is to lead a Godly life, growing and flourishing with the nurture of this Holy Spirit. As such, this Sacrament of Baptism is supremely corporate in nature. It is part of the very stuff than binds God's people together. It certainly bound the first 3,000 together, for from that first day of Pentecost the church blossomed through its unity of Spiritual conviction from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

When Jesus rose from His Baptism in the waters of the Jordan His commission to our freedom began. In that rising from the water Jesus officially began His journey to glory freeing all of us from the bondage of death. This Baptism of Jesus is the Icon for what we do today (Stevenson 144). This is really the beginning of what Isaiah describes as our going out in joy and being lead forth in peace, as creation breaks out in song before us (See Is.55:12)

Dear friends, the 3,000 who were plunged under the Baptismal waters on that first Pentecost rose into a cosmic event (Chan 118). And we share that same cosmic event today. Baptism marks the wellspring of eternal life for us all. We wash ourselves from old Adam and put on our new life in Christ; a fuller, richer life in the inseparable physical and Spiritual realms of His creation. Baptism is that Sacramental covenant which binds us all today together and to God, just as we bind ourselves together through our recommital in faith to that other glorious child born in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. Baptism is God's victory in our lives and our victory in His. Therefore, let us praise Him forever. JWB+ 7-12-17

### **Sources**

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N.B. All Scripture verses quoted in this paper are from the NIV translation.