

MESSAGE - *Following Jesus into and out of the Water*

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If you've ever lived in or around Boone County, Illinois, you know about a special place called Edwards Apple Orchard. It's a family establishment that has become a destination and a tradition. When I was pastor at the Poplar Grove church, I was blessed to serve this family as a part of the congregation and I remember one particular day in late August....Bob Edwards who had started the business with his wife Betty, called the church office and said to me, "Lisa, I have the donut machines up and running and trying out a test batch....would you like to come out?" I hung up the phone, said to the administrator – it's an emergency I have to go, and off I went to the orchard.

Bob showed me the donut making process, told me the story of how long that machine had been around and even its name...was it Ethel? And then he made a batch of donuts....as they were lifted from the cooking oil, they fell into the cinnamon sugar mixture and then Bob poured some fresh apple cider and handed me a fresh donut and we ate.

It was a moment for me....I felt welcomed. I felt like I had become a part of something. I felt like I was baptized into the local culture and received into a family. I've never forgotten that.

And I've often thought that is the way every baptism in the church should feel like....with a spotlight of welcome and that you are now a part of something special...something different from the rest of life.

It's what we hear happened with Jesus one day.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into

his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

¹⁹ But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰ Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

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Baptism is one of those things that the church has wrestled with trying to fully understand. It's a ritual with certain words and with water....but what is it exactly?

We as the church universal struggle with how baptism should be practiced: immersion, pouring or sprinkling.....in fact all three forms are biblically based and symbolically significant.

We wrestle with who can be baptized: infants and children or do you need to be a believer?.....

We wrestle with what baptism is all about: in the baptism that John was performing in the Jordan river, baptism was about repentance and getting yourself ready...

*What must we do?*

But in the church, we have come to understand that it that and so much more.

When it comes to Jesus being baptized, we wrestle with why?....in Matthew's telling of the story, we hear John voice the same concern we all might face: why does Jesus need to be baptized? What does he need to repent of? Why would he need to ready himself when he's what everyone needs to get ready for? John says to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus told John it was so that all righteousness would be fulfilled. My take on what Jesus said: he needs to publicly join the movement.

In spite of all these issues, the church in every place and time has not let go of the importance and centrality of baptism. That baptism is about who we are as the church.

We learn this as we follow Jesus into the water.....

When Jesus is in the water, I get this sense of a lingering there.....he is praying. Experiencing the moment. Fully immersing himself, not only in the river, but in the presence of God. And in his experience, the heavens opened up and he is anointed with the Holy Spirit and claimed as God's son.

It's a supernatural event....the heaven opening up.

While that doesn't happen in every baptism, obviously, it happens so that Jesus doesn't have to testify to himself. He doesn't have to tell people, that he is the son of God. Who's going to believe that?

God marks Jesus' identity right then and there in the presence of others.

And when we follow Jesus into the water, we too receive our identity:

We are claimed and named'  
Identified as children of God;  
As citizens of a heavenly kingdom

And that feels so good. To be claimed and welcomed.

Like eating a hot apple cider donut and drinking cold apple cider and becoming a part of something larger than ourselves.

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But, is that all baptism is? a one-off event? ...a box that is ticked off?

Of course not. We learn this as we follow Jesus out of the water....

Baptism is just the entry point....after which is the whole follow through.

Kind of like making a tradition out of going to the apple orchard....living out being a part of that family....

Baptism is about showing up in that identity every day afterward.

Think about it: What if Jesus did not live out his identity as the Son of God?

What if he pushed his way through life, with his little name badge on, but not living out what being the Son of God means?

Jesus lives that out immediately after his baptism.

He heads right out into the wilderness for 40 days where he is tempted.

He is tempted specifically to not live into his identity.

The devil tempts him to use his identity to serve himself.....when Jesus is hungry, the devil says to him "turn these stones into bread".

And the devil tempts him that he can "have it all".....all the kingdoms are yours but you have to worship me.

And the devil tempts him to test his identity...."if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the top of the temple and make sure that God will catch you.....

We too are tempted every day to not live into the identity we are given in our baptism.

To serve ourselves

To "have it all"

To question God's love

To forget the faith

To follow the broken paths in life

This is why, while we do not practice re-baptism in our tradition (because this would be saying that God didn't do something right in our original baptism), we do practice a remembrance or reaffirmation of our baptism....to call ourselves to reclaim who we are and to live a different kind of life.

It is to look at ourselves in the reflection of our baptismal waters:

To remember that God loves us and no matter what, we can re-start our faith journey.

It is to live out a more and more mature response to God's love.

It is to take the time to restate what we believe, re-claim who we are, and commit to follow it up with action.

Today is a day that we can:

Remember our baptism. Claim our baptism. Live our baptism.

And in a few moments we are going to have that opportunity.

As the choir sings, let us prepare our hearts to look at ourselves in the baptismal waters.

To remember we follow Jesus into the water and into baptism

And out of the water and into the rest of our lives as God's children.

RENEWAL OF BAPTISM

Through baptism, God gave us a gracious sign of love and hope in Christ.

In baptism, God has promised by grace alone to forgive our sins, to adopt us into the body of Christ, to send the Holy Spirit to renew and cleanse us, and to resurrect us to eternal life. Water is the outward and visible sign of this inward grace toward us. Water cleanses, purifies, refreshes, and sustains. Jesus Christ is living water.

Every day we are to respond to God's baptismal covenant; we are to love and trust God completely, to forsake the evil in the world, and to live a new and holy life.

Therefore, on behalf of the church universal, I invite you to renew your response to what God has done for you in baptism by asking you:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of evil that rebel against God?

I renounce them.

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

I renounce them.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ?

Yes, I turn to him as my Lord and Savior.

Do you intend to continue as Christ's faithful disciple: to practice justice, to resist evil, to witness to the living Christ, to trust his promises, to follow his teaching, to honor his church, to further his mission, and to show his love?

Yes, God helping me.

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended to heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

You have publicly professed your faith. Will you devote yourself to the worship of God, to the study of the Word, to the breaking of bread, to the fellowship of believers, and to the life of prayer?

I will, with God's help.

Thanksgiving over the Water

Fall afresh on us, Holy Spirit!

Fall afresh upon these waters.

Let these waters be to us drops of your mercy.

Let these waters remind us of your salvation, righteousness and justice.

Let these waters renew in us the resurrection power of Jesus.

Let these waters make us long for your coming kingdom.

Water is shared.

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

Amen.

The Holy Spirit work within you, that having been born through water and the Spirit, you may live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Let us rejoice in the faithfulness of our God.

We give thanks for all that God has already given us; for all God has done for us; and for all God does through us. Lord Jesus, may you find us to be faithful followers, so that you are glorified now and forever. Amen.