

“Unity by Design” – Baptism **September 22, 2019**

Good morning. For those who are here visiting this morning or if you haven't been here for a couple of weeks, we're currently in a preaching series entitled, "**Unity by Design**". During this series we're discovering the roots, both historical and theological, to the Christian Church movement that we're apart of. Last week we looked at the historical roots and were reminded that the main intent behind the formation of the Christian Church was that of unity. The main founders were trying to get away from all of the things that so often divide Christians into separate denominations and to unite under the core basics of the Christian faith and then to agree to disagree on many other theological stances. In trying to establish the core basics of the faith to agree on just a few core beliefs. Among those were the following:

1. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God
2. Christians should celebrate the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week
3. Baptism of adult believers by immersion in water is a necessary condition for salvation.

This morning we're going to look at the beauty of baptism and next week begin looking at the celebration of the Lord's Supper and it's significance.

However, as we begin looking at baptism, I'll readily admit that it seems somewhat strange to talk about unity and baptism together since people's views on baptism have often been a source of division within Christianity.

Views on Baptism:

- Baptism of infants to erase the effects of original sin
- Baptism of infants as a sign of dedication to the Lord
- Baptism viewed as an optional but not necessary act
- Disagreement over sprinkling vs. immersion as the practice
- Disagreement over whether baptism is for salvation or for church membership

And I'm sure I'm missing some options as well. I think we can all agree that it's been difficult to unite around the practice of baptism.

Even the founders didn't necessarily agree on their views of baptism.

- **Alexander Campbell** believed a person needed to be immersed to become a member of his church.
- **Barton W. Stone** didn't feel it was necessary for a person to be immersed to become a member.

However, baptism was one of the key issues that began the Restoration Movement. Both Campbell and Stone were preachers in the Presbyterian church to begin with. But it was when the Campbell's had their first daughter and she was of the age to be sprinkled for her original sin that Alexander began searching the Scriptures for the support for this practice and could not find any examples of infants begin baptized in Scripture. He also couldn't find support for the doctrine of original sin, which was the main reason for the practice of baptizing infants, so on June 12, 1812, Alexander and Thomas Campbell (father and son), their wives, one of Alexander's sisters, and several other members of their church were immersed by a Baptist minister. That began a long association with other Baptists.

However, over time, there came a pulling away from the Baptists because of the belief that baptism was not just a necessary work of obedience after a person was saved, but that baptism was actually the vehicle by which a person's sins were washed away and they were saved.

This belief was based on such verses as

Acts 2:38 where Peter answers the crowds question as to what they should do, now that they realized that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. In his answer, Peter seems to link repentance and baptism to the forgiveness of their sins and receiving the Holy Spirit into their lives.

1 Peter 3:21 where Peter compares the water that flooded the earth and God miraculously saved 8 people, (Noah and his family), through that water, and now the waters of baptism have the power to save us, not just by getting wet but by making a personal pledge and commitment to God.

There were many other Scriptures that led Campbell and Stone and many many others to the conclusion that Biblical baptism is not just a “nice” thing to do, but was actually intended by God to be the process by which an individual was saved. Over the years, this belief about the importance of baptism in the salvation process has led many to accuse the Christian Church/Church of Christ to be guilty of practicing salvation by works – in that we have to do something to be saved, rather than merely accepting God’s free gift of grace offered through Jesus Christ. And one of the strongest Scriptures to use, which I love is **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Clearly, we’re not saved by **works** so then how does baptism fit into the salvation process?

This morning I want to attempt to explain the beauty and the power of baptism as presented in the Scriptures. I believe it must sadden God’s heart that this incredibly powerful and beautiful act of baptism has become such a point of disagreement and division among Christians for hundreds of years. And admittedly, this brief presentation may leave you with more questions than answers, and I believe that’s a good thing, if it causes you to want to dig deeper into God’s Word to find out answers for yourself.

Let me begin in the Old Testament and introduce you to a concept called **mikveh**.

A mikveh is a Jewish ritual bath used for the purpose of inward purification.

Biblically it was required for:

- Women after childbirth
- A bride before her wedding
- Men on the eve of Yom Kippur
- Priests (in the Temple) before serving
- Purification from leprosy
- After touching a dead body
- Conversion of Gentiles to the Jewish faith (although that’s not mentioned in Scripture) it became part of the Jewish practice prior to Jesus and is still practiced today.
- Many Jews today use the mikveh to mark a **celebratory event** (such as a bar mitzvah or graduation) or to signify a new start after an illness, a trauma or a loss.

In archaeological excavations around Jerusalem, they’ve found many homes with a mikveh in their basements.

So, when **John the Baptist** came to prepare people for Jesus, he was out by the Jordan River preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This wasn’t for salvation but to prepare people’s hearts and minds for the message Jesus would bring about turning from their current lifestyles and seeking God’s gift of salvation. However, that kind of baptism couldn’t happen until after Jesus died for our sins. John the Baptist’s message may have been disputed by some but his baptism of repentance would have made perfect sense to all Jews.

And if you remember, when Jesus was preparing for his ministry he also came and had John baptize him – not because he had any sin in his life, but as an example to each of us..

One of the last commands Jesus gave to his disciples is recorded for us in Matthew 28:18-20. Most of you are familiar with this. I’m going to read it out of the Complete Jewish Bible this morning to let you see it in from the perspective of a first century Jew, which were his apostles who first heard this.

Matthew 28:18-20 **Complete Jewish Bible (CJB)**

¹⁸ Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim (disciples) immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit), ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age."

In the Jewish New Testament Commentary, David Stern writes: that the word, *baptize*, refers to a process in which **the thing that is immersed takes on the qualities of the substance into which it is immersed**. He uses the example of cloth into a dye solution. This is why being immersed into the Messiah is equated with being united with Him.

That's consistent with what Paul says in Galatians 3:26-28

Galatians 3:26-28 (NIV) *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

When we're baptized we strip off who we were prior to this event and we take on a whole new self – we take on Jesus Christ. And by this baptism all Christians become mini Christ's walking upon this earth. And the longer we're Christians the more accurate portrayal of Christ we should become, as the Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out. And did you notice the effect of this transformation – it's unity. We have unity not uniformity because we're all striving to become just like Christ, and there aren't multiple Christ's, there's only one – so all Christians are focused on the same person.

Paul basically says the same thing but he uses the uniting with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection in the act of baptism.

Romans 6:1-4 (NIV) *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Prior to this section of Scripture certain people are arguing that if indeed we're saved by God's grace, then I should be able to live my life anyway I want to after accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Paul counters that argument with this section right here. And his argument is basically that if you really accepted Jesus Christ then you were baptized. And baptism is meant to symbolize you giving up control of your life to Jesus. When you are baptized in water, it's like you're dying to your old self and being buried, just like Jesus was by going under the water, and then you leave that old self down there in the water, and as you rise up out of that watery grave you are now clothed with Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, to live a brand new life.

If you read through the book of Acts you'll see a pretty consistent pattern that was laid out by Jesus in Matthew 28:18, which we read earlier that people, as they turned from their old lives and accepted Jesus Christ – they were baptized. Sometimes on the side of the road (like the Ethiopian eunuch) and sometimes in the wee hours of the morning (like the Philippian jailer and his household).

Does every conversion in the book of Acts mention that they were baptized? No Often it just says that they believed and were saved. But I believe if you take Jesus' instruction with what Paul and Peter taught later and see the consistent practice of the early church, you can't help but appreciate the beauty and the power of the act of baptism.

So, then the objection comes, but are you saved by simply believing and accepting Jesus Christ or do you need to be baptized to be saved?

I'd like to answer that with a slightly different analogy.

Over the years I've performed lots of weddings. Let me ask you, when exactly are a bride and groom officially married?

- Is it when they finish saying their vows, (where they commit their lives to each other),
- is it after the exchange of rings,
- is it after they kiss,
- is it after I declare them husband and wife
- or is it after the state of Minnesota receives the paperwork signed by me and register them in their files?

If you're engaged to be married and you're planning out the details of your wedding and your partner says, I don't think we need to do the exchange of rings for us to be married (they are way too much money), and I'm not really not into the whole commitment thing with the vows, and do we really have to kiss in front of all of those people, and couldn't we just do it privately between the two of us (so we can save the cost of a minister) and how about we not worry about filing it with the state (and save us some money)? I guess I'd question whether that partner really wants to get married at all.

I believe that God, in His infinite wisdom and creativity and consistency set up baptism as an outward demonstration of our commitment to Him and our desire to die to our old self and begin to live for Him and with His power. It's a package deal. Baptism is our visible acceptance of God's generous gift of new life through Jesus.

Works:

- **Works of merit** – done to earn something (like your job)
- **Works of faith** – done to receive something (like salvation).

I want to close with a Scripture which does a great job drawing this all together.

Titus 3:3-7 (NIV) *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

God didn't save us because of anything we did but because of His mercy. It's all about what God does. God saved us through the washing of rebirth (baptism) and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Here at Knollwood, we try to live our lives and pattern this church as closely as we can after the teachings and patterns of the early church. Therefore, we practice baptism by immersion of anyone who desires to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. And therefore, we assume that if you want to become a member of this church you are also interested in living your life by that same standard. Therefore, we desire that all members be immersed believers. By setting that standard we're not at all saying that you're not a follower of Jesus Christ if you haven't been immersed, but we're inviting you to examine the Scriptures and perhaps take that next exciting step of declaring outwardly that you're a follower of Jesus Christ and you want everyone to know that and a great way to declare that is through baptism.

We're going to close the service with an invitation hymn to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Please come forward while we sing it if that's your desire this morning.

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Views on Baptism:

What view of baptism were you raised with?
What view of baptism do you currently hold?

What did Peter tell the crowd they needed to do when they realized that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. (Acts 2:38)

According to 1 Peter 3:21 what does baptism represent?

Mikveh =

Matthew 28:19-20: David Stern writes: *“The thing that is immersed takes on the qualities of the substance into which it is immersed.”*

Galatians 3:26-28 what happens in baptism?

Romans 6:1-4 what happens in baptism?

Types of Works:

- Works of _____ = done to _____ something
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