

September 8, 2013  
Rally Day 2013

*After the Water Dries*

Matthew 3:13-17/ 2 Timothy 1:3-7

**Opening words:** This is Rally Day and we begin our fall programming. A large part of our programming revolves around our young. I have spent the last few months putting our children's Sunday school back together. I have recruited both teachers and students. I am excited about getting MYF started and I am thankful for those individuals who have volunteered to lead Jr. Church. We are not just preparing our young to be future leaders in this congregation. We are preparing them for eternity. How could we enjoy heaven if one of them was missing? There is no substitute for a quality Christian education. We begin to prepare our young on the day they are baptized. In our tradition we practice infant baptism. How many of you were baptized as an infant? How many of you had your children baptized as infants?

We are instructed today from two pieces of scripture. First, the Gospel lesson comes from the third chapter of Matthew, Jesus' baptism. The church has always wanted to do what Jesus did. Second, the epistle lesson comes from the opening words from Second Timothy. What you want to listen for is the family connection between Timothy, his mother and his grandmother. May God give you ears to hear both of these sacred texts. Let me call this message *After the Water Dries*.

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**Matthew 3:13-17** <sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

<sup>15</sup> Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

<sup>16</sup> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

<sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

**2 Timothy 1:3-7** <sup>3</sup> I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. <sup>4</sup> Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup> I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. <sup>6</sup> For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. <sup>7</sup> For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

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History tells us that King Aengus was baptized by St. Patrick in the middle of the fifth century. Sometime during the rite, St. Patrick leaned on his sharp-pointed staff and inadvertently stabbed the king's foot. After the baptism was over, St. Patrick looked down at all the blood, realized what he had done, and begged the king's forgiveness. The Saint asked, "Why did you suffer this pain in silence?" The king replied, "I thought it was part of the ritual." His understanding of baptism came up a little short. This is my question for you today. Do you understand the full meaning of Christian baptism? If you have something to learn, then say, "**Amen!**"

Baptism was a big topic when Kathryn and I were in Ukraine. Our host Patrick Whaley was planning a baptismal service and was encouraging everyone who had never been baptized to be baptized. I don't know how else to say it. Spiritually, the people seem confused. They were part of the Soviet Union, so there is a Communist hangover. Some believed in nothing. They are working too hard to survive to worry about eternity. Many Ukrainians profess to be Orthodox, but they do not practice the faith. Cults, like Mormonism, have come to their land with their bad theology. The Protestants, like Methodism, are lumped together. Patrick's baptism service is important because he was simply trying to lead the people back to their Christian core. He was not promoting the United Methodist Church. He was simply promoting Jesus! The Master is the real meaning of any form of baptism. Without Jesus, there is no need to baptize.

The early church seemed to understand this point. For them, baptism was an admission of adoption. The early church did not create baptism; they redefined baptism. It all began with God's Chosen People. Never forget, the Jews are both a race and a faith. Some were born into the faith. Other non-Jews, Gentiles, wanted to join the faith. They were baptized. The symbolism was clear. The individual was held under the water to symbolize a washing. They were washing away the sins of their old life and starting over again fresh and new.

This was the baptism that John the Baptist practiced. Many left the city and went into the wilderness to be baptized by John. One of those individuals was Jesus. However, this is the problem. Jesus never sinned, so why would he need a sinner's baptism? I don't have the answer to that question, but I do know Jesus' baptism signaled the beginning of his earthly ministry. The rest is history. The early church wanted to be like Jesus, so they baptized new converts. However, the symbolism changed. When you were held under the water you were dying with Christ. When you were pulled out of the water you were being resurrected with Christ. We call that form of baptism immersion or believer's baptism. How many of you were baptized by immersion?

Everyone would have been immersed if it wasn't for the Dark Ages. For it was during that horrible time period baptism, itself, changed. You know it is true. Moms and dads have always loved their children. The problem was that during the Dark Ages, the infant mortality rate was sky high. Parents were afraid their children wouldn't make it into heaven without baptism, so they ran their newborns to the church to be baptized,

just in case the unthinkable happened. Their desire was to wash away the original sin from Adam so they could enter into eternal peace. It is for this reason the vast majority of the western Church practices infant baptism. It is why we practice infant baptism. How many of you were baptized as an infant?

In infant baptism two things happen. First, we wash away the original sin of Adam. Within each newborn is a flaw that leads them to sin. I have never met a perfect person. Does anyone here claim to be perfect? Second, we recognize the importance of environment. Children are not born into isolation. They are born into communities. Part of that community is family. Part of that community is the church. The goal of infant baptism is salvation. We are promising to influence the child toward Jesus, our only hope of salvation. We want the child to wade into the faith gently. Not everyone needs to jump off the high dive.

Today, on Rally Day, I want to look at the significance of infant baptism. I will do that by looking at the ritual we use that is found in the *United Methodist Book of Worship*. The truth is, infant baptism doesn't last just a few moments on a certain day. Infant baptism is not an event; infant baptism is a beginning of a journey that lasts for years. Perhaps, in the history of the church, we have spent too much time talking about water and not enough time talking about what happens after the water dries? My thoughts for today are wrapped around three words. Each word begins with the letter **F**. The first word is faith. Jesus is our only hope of salvation. The second word is family. Babies do not develop in isolation. Babies are influenced by the people who love them the most. The third and final word is fellowship. In other words, we are promising to create a Christian environment to help the family lead this child toward Jesus. So if you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

### **Faith**

The first word is *faith*. Look at the Gospel lesson with me for today. John is in the wilderness baptizing people in the Jordan. There must have been a sea of sinful faces, which is why one sinless face stuck out. It was the face of his perfect cousin, Jesus. John believes in Jesus from the very beginning. He knew his place in world history was secondary to Jesus' place. It is for this reason that he is uncomfortable baptizing Jesus. Why would a sinless person need a sinner's baptism? Yet, Jesus is determined to be baptized. When Jesus is baptized, something wonderful happens. God, Himself, suddenly appears. God says in verse 17, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*" In other words, God is endorsing Jesus as the Messiah. For the Jews it meant the waiting was over. The Messiah had finally arrived. To us, it means more. It means that Jesus was the most unique life that ever lived. He was the very incarnation of God, the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. He is our only hope of salvation. Baptism reminds us that Christianity is the one true faith! By your presence here today, I am assuming you believe Christianity is the one true faith. If you believe Christianity is the one true faith, say, "**Amen!**"

## Family

The second word is *family*. Look at the epistle lesson for today. The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to a young pastor by the name of Timothy. He is giving him some pastoral advice. Paul is not writing to a stranger. He is writing to someone he knew well. He knew his personal story and he knew his family. He knew his grandmother Lois and he knew his grandmother Eunice. He knew of their faith and he knew they placed their faith in Jesus in him. I do not know how much Paul knew about family dynamics, but I do know this. Paul knew the greatest influence on Timothy's life was his family. Their greatest influence on your life is your family. The greatest influence on the child being baptized is his or her family.

That is why in the ritual we ask the parents of the baby these questions:

**Beloved, do you in presenting this child for holy Baptism confess your faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?**

**Do you therefore accept your duty and privilege to live before this child a life that becomes the Gospel; to exercise all godly care that he be brought up in the Christian, that he be taught the Holy Scriptures, and that he may learn to give the reverent attendance upon the private and public worship of God?**

**Will you endeavor to keep the child under the ministry and guidance of the church?**

The parents always say, "We do" or "We will." However, on the day the parents answer, "No!" the baptism is over. Infant baptism means nothing if the faith means nothing to the parents. Let me ask you this question, how important is the faith to you? If you want your child to take the faith seriously then you must take the faith seriously. If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" In infant baptism we are admitting Christianity is the one true faith. In infant baptism the family is promising to be a holy model of Christian living. That takes us to the third word.

## Fellowship

The third word is *fellowship*. There comes a point in the baptism ritual that the attention leaves the baby and the parents. It is now the church's turn to make the promise. How many times have you recited these words?

**With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life.**

Don't just read the words, look at the meaning. The church is promising to create a Christian environment to influence the child toward salvation. That is why Vacation Bible School is important. That is why Sunday school is so important.

That is why the annual mission trip is so important. (Next year, they are going to Burlington, New Jersey.) That is why Jr. Church is so important. God has entrusted these young souls to us so we must be at our best. How could you enjoy the riches of heaven if one of these precious souls was missing? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** This is the truth. We can have the best Christian Education program in the history of the church, but if the parents don't give us the opportunity to work with their young, then it means nothing!

Recently, I had the privilege of baptizing a little girl by the name of Lucy. Baptisms are great for a variety of reasons. First, baptisms are great because they bring people to the church. It is not fun preaching to a half empty room. The more, the merrier. Second, baptisms are great because they remind us of the goodness in younger generations. Sometimes we fail to see the goodness in other generations. Church is the last place where all generations mix. Third and finally, baptisms are great because we get to see a baby. How often do you get to see a baby? That is why I walk around with the baby. During those few sacred moments, the spotlight rested squarely on Lucy. It was a nice moment for the family and parents. It was a nice moment for the church. Someone said to me at the conclusion of the worship, "It was a nice baptism. I was sorry when it ended." This is the good news for today. Lucy's baptism isn't over. It is just beginning. The real work begins after the water dries.

This is Rally Day and on this day it is a good day to remember the day your young were baptized. How could that much time have passed? It is a good day to remember all the baptisms you have observed in your life. Baptism is not about us. First, baptism is about the **faith**, itself. Christianity is the one true faith. Jesus is our only hope of salvation. Second, baptism is about **family**. It is the family who has the greatest influence on the child. Are you leading this child toward Jesus? Third and finally, baptism is about **fellowship**. Are we doing our best to form a Christian environment for them? Are you practicing today what you will do in heaven for eternity? Watchman Nee once said, *"Baptism is an outward expression of an inward faith."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

Will you pray with me?