

Sunday Sermon: January 13, 2019

Sermon Theme: Saved Through Baptism

1. By the Father's Mercy
2. By the Holy Spirit's Power
3. By Christ's Work

Sermon Text: Titus 3:4-7

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.

If you were God, how would you save people? Would you hold interviews to see who was worthy? Would you have some sort of checklist? Would you let your friends in? Would you allow a certain kind of person in? Would it be by birth or by pedigree? Would you just wing it and choose case-by-case? For each of these ideas, what would your criteria be? Where would you draw the line, who gets in and who doesn't? The more we think about it, the harder it might be to actually figure out who we would save and who we wouldn't. We will never have to answer those questions, because God already did.

There are millions of ways that God could have chosen to save us. However, he chose one simple way. He chose to save the whole world by sending his Son to be our Savior. There are millions of ways that God could give that salvation to us, again he has chosen something simple. God makes the blessings of Jesus ours through the Means of Grace, which is the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

This morning we celebrate that God has made the blessings of Jesus ours through the Gospel in the sacrament of Baptism. We thank God that baptism saves us through the Father's love and mercy, the Holy Spirit's power, and Christ's work.

We are saved through baptism because God the Father loves us. Paul says, **“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.”** The first step in deciding who you will let into heaven, isn't even the criteria of getting in, it's actually deciding if you want to let anyone in. How many times, have we just wanted to be left alone or have some peace from coworkers or friends? Maybe we don't want the drama around us, we just want peace and quiet. Maybe an eternity of peace and quiet sounds good.

God could have chosen not to save us at all. Would we save people like us? Look at our sinfulness, our disobedience, our sinful hatred, arrogance, and selfish thoughts. Is there really anything about us that is worth saving?

But God chose to love us anyway. He showed his love by sending his Son to be the Savior of the world. He showed his love by giving us the Gospel so that every single person might hear and believe in what Jesus has done to save them.

God gives his Gospel in two ways: the Gospel in the Word and the Gospel in the Sacraments. The Gospel in the Word is clear. Whenever we hear, study or learn what Jesus has done to save us at church, in Bible Study, or in a devotion this is the Gospel in the Word.

In the Sacraments, we have that Gospel in the Word attached to real, physical earthly things where God gives us the same promises, the same blessings, in a very real and personal, yet miraculous and spiritual way.

In baptism, we see the promises of God connected to the earthly element of water. That may seem foolish to us, water put on the head doesn't seem powerful. Martin Luther points out to us that the power of baptism to save is not in the water, but in the Word of God. **It is certainly not the water that does these things, but God's Word which is in and with the water and faith which believes these promises which God gives to us connected to the water.**

The water is not used alone, if it were, it would be no better than the bath or shower water, but when that water is connected to God's powerful promises in his Word, which we hear every time we have a baptism. **I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**, it becomes the life-giving and life-saving washing with water that God promises.

Sometimes we might have a hard time understanding how the Gospel works to save us. Baptism saves us because the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel in Baptism.

We have many passages that say that God's Word, his Gospel, is powerful. We hear it is living and active, it will not return empty, it will accomplish what God desires. Yet, we are tempted to think that the Bible is just an old book which is out of touch and out of date. We tend to think that it is not something that is worth our time right now.

The Gospel is powerful because it is never alone, wherever the Gospel is preached the Holy Spirit is working through that Gospel to bring people like you and me to faith and to keep them in that faith.

Baptism saves us because the Holy Spirit is at work through the Gospel which is connected to the water. Paul says, **He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously**

Jesus talked about baptism saving. **Jesus said, "Unless a man is born of the water and the spirit he cannot come to me."** At the time Jesus said this, Nicodemus did not understand what he meant. Jesus was not talking about a physical birth, rather he was talking about a spiritual birth in which the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts to save us.

This is what happens in baptism; baptism is an outward sign of what the Holy Spirit is doing in our hearts. Water can wash us of dirt and grime and make us clean again. In the waters of Baptism, where we have the power of God at work, we are washed clean of our sins. Just as Jesus says, after Baptism, a new person is born where the old one was. This new person is a new person of faith because the Holy Spirit is now working and strengthening faith in our hearts. This new person is an heir of eternal life and part of God's family through the work the Holy Spirit does.

The devil wants to tempt us that this is too hard to understand. The devil wants us to think that the miracle of faith the Holy Spirit works can't work that way. If we put water on the head, say some words from the Bible, we are forgiven, we are made a new person, we are given eternal life. That doesn't make sense.

If we would just say on our own, put water on your head and be saved. But when God makes the promise then we should listen and believe... because God says baptism saves. **He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit 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 loves us and graciously gives his blessings of faith, forgiveness of sins, life and salvation whenever we hear the Gospel. God sends his Holy Spirit to work faith in our hearts to believe something very special. Baptism saves because Jesus has suffered and died to take away our sins.

Baptism isn't a rite of passage. It's not a ritual. It's not a confirmation. Baptism is a means of grace through which God gives to us the gifts that Jesus won on the cross.

Paul says we are justified by God's grace through Christ. Christ has declared us not guilty because he was declared guilty of our sins. By ourselves we deserve nothing. Sin lives in us and is a part of us. We are not innocent. But because of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross we are declared innocent. We are given forgiveness instead of punishment, life instead of death, peace instead of penance.

Since Jesus blood has washed away all sins, we can be sure that when God says baptism saved, it does. His promise is not based on the work we do, or on our goodness, or ability to save ourselves. The promise of our salvation, the promise of baptism, lies in the work that Jesus has already completed.

Through the Gospel in Baptism all the blessings that Jesus won for us are given to us by the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter whether a baby or adult gets baptized. God's promise includes many miracles in baptism; faith is created and grows, we are delivered from death and the devil, we are made an heir of eternal life, we are saved for that life with Jesus in heaven all because of what Jesus has done and the work the Holy Spirit does to bring us to faith and keep us in that faith.

We have reason to thank and praise God. We don't even need to worry about our own salvation, God has already taken care of all of that through Jesus.

The blessings that Jesus won for us become our through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit works faith which believes these promises that God makes.

God loves us, he sent his Son to save us. Now through the power of the Holy Spirit, God works through baptism to forgive us and to save us.