



# Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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## Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology Understanding Baptism (Part I)

<sup>9</sup> *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.*

<sup>11</sup> *And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:9-11  
NRSV*

<sup>19</sup> *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matt 28:19-20 NRSV*

The United Methodist Church recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Like the Lord's Supper, there is a certain amount of controversy among the various Christian traditions over the meaning and purpose of Baptism. This week I would like to address the basic theology of Baptism, from the United Methodist perspective, and next week, I will deal with some of the controversies.

The Greek word for "baptize" literally means "to dip." As used in the New Testament it refers to a Jewish ritual of purification administered by John the Baptizer (John the Dipper) or Christian Baptism as the initiation ritual for the Church. To understand Christian Baptism, it's appropriate to start with John's ritual purification of Jesus.

John was administering a baptism of repentance:

<sup>4</sup> *John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

<sup>5</sup> *And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Mark 1:4-5*

Repent means "to turn" and in this context repentance means to turn one's life toward God; to live in righteousness, "right relationship," to God. The people would confess their sins before John and the gathered community, promise to live lives of righteousness and then they were washed in the waters of the Jordan as a symbol of the cleansing of their souls from sin.

But when Jesus came to be baptized, something new happened. Like all of the people coming to John, Jesus would have confessed his sins and promised to live a life in right relationship to God. But, as he came out of the water, Jesus perceived the Spirit of God descending upon him and heard the voice of God claiming him as God's son. Unlike all the other baptisms performed by John, God was a part of this baptism. Our understanding of Christian Baptism proceeds from the understanding that Baptism is an act of God, something God does. Paul later spoke of this as adoption by God:

*<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, **but you have received a spirit of adoption.** When we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*  
*Romans 8:14-17 NRSV*

*<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> in order to redeem those who were under the law, **so that we might receive adoption as children.** <sup>6</sup> And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. Gal 4:4-7 NRSV*

A sacrament is the outward sign of the inward working of the grace of God. In this case, the act of baptizing someone is the outward sign of the Church of the inward grace of God that has laid claim to the person being baptized. This distinction is important because it acknowledges something that Christians often forget. The church does not dispense salvation. Salvation is an act and gift of God. Thus, the church's failure to baptize someone cannot prevent the grace of God from claiming that person. In the classic example, an unbaptized child is not denied salvation because God can, and we believe does claim that child for God's own despite the lack of baptism.

As indicated in Matthew 29:19, and in the letters of Paul, the Church has always used baptism as a rite of initiation into the Church. Baptism is always done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Paul uses this aspect of the ritual when chiding the Church at Corinth:

*<sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*  
*1 Corinthians 1:13 NRSV*

Members of the Church at Corinth were apparently making claims of superiority based upon who had baptized them: Paul, the disciple Peter or the evangelist, Apollos. Paul makes it plain that the identity of the person baptizing is not the focus. This later became important in the Church when persons baptized by heretical priests or priests who had committed grievous sins came before the Church. Because baptism was viewed as an outward sign of the act of God in adopting that person, it was determined that God's act could not be undermined by the sins or heresies of the person performing the baptism. The only intent that matters is the desire to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as an act of submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The United Methodist Church recognizes all Christian baptisms, even those from Christian traditions that would not recognize a baptism in the United Methodist Church.

Moreover, by long Christian tradition, any Christian can perform a baptism if the need arises. Ideally, baptism should take place before a gathered Christian Community and be performed by the pastoral leaders of that community. However, it is not unheard of for any available Christian to perform a baptism at the site of an accident, in a hospital room, on a battlefield or other place where someone desires baptism but it is not possible

to formally join the person to a specific Christian community. The Christian undertaking that obligation should seek to join the person baptized with a specific Christian community as soon as possible.

The traditional formula for the commitments made at baptism is:

1. Renunciation of the evil forces of the world/Renunciation of Satan;
2. Acceptance of Christ as Lord and savior;
3. Affirmation of belief in God and the Holy spirit; and
4. The commitment to live as part of the Body of Christ.

These vows are normally made by the person being baptized or, if the person cannot speak for themselves, by another on their behalf. In that regard, it needs to be noted that, from the earliest records available to us, it is clear that the Church has always baptized infants and small children and others unable to answer for themselves. When it is possible for those persons to speak on their own behalf, it is also traditional to ask those persons to reaffirm for themselves the vows made at their baptism. This is the basis for the United Methodist practice of Confirmation (a practice followed by other Christian traditions as well.)

Finally, just as Jesus experienced the Spirit of God descending upon him at his own baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit is invoked as part of the liturgy. The traditional formula in the United Methodist tradition is:

*(Name), the Holy Spirit work within you, that having been born through water and the Spirit, you may live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.*

This is accompanied by the laying on of hands by the person performing the baptism as well as by family members and close friends of the person being baptized. This last is also part of the liturgy for Confirmation.

When someone is baptized, the community also makes commitments to that person. The community agrees to work to strengthen the faith of the person being baptized and to help them live a life of Christian discipleship. When infants are baptized, the broader church, as well as the parents, commit to help raise that infant in the Christian faith so that they may one day profess faith in Christ for themselves.

Despite being the liturgy that is common to most Christian traditions, this is also the liturgy that seems to divide us the most. Next week I'll deal with some of the controversies that arise around the sacrament of baptism.

## **Easter Sermon Series**

### **Christian Essentials**

On Easter Sunday I started a new sermon series called "Christian essentials." The second Sunday in Easter I preached on the subject "Doubt is Good." This series will continue through the next four Sundays in Easter (The time between Easter Sunday and Pentecost is Easter). The purpose of the series is to address some of the questions common to new Christians and old alike. The sermon Titles are:

*How Can I Believe in the Resurrection? (Easter Sunday)*  
*Doubt is Good (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Easter)*  
*It's all About Christ*  
*We Worship God, Not the Bible*  
*God Will Not Leave You Behind*

## *We Are the Body of Christ*

Any time is a good time to invite someone you know to share in our worship. But a sermon series, in particular, provides an opportunity to open such a discussion and make an invitation. Always remember, most new people come to a church because someone they know invites them.

### **Sermon Topics**

It has been a while since I reminded everyone that I would like to hear from you regarding sermon topics. Not all topics lend themselves to a sermon format, even as part of a series. But if there is a topic you would like addressed I'd be glad to do so. If, in my judgment, we cannot fit the topic into a sermon format we can schedule a class to study the question from a Christian and biblical perspective.

## **The Poverty and Justice Bible**

*The Poverty & Justice Bible* is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to [www.Justicebible.org](http://www.Justicebible.org).

*<sup>17</sup> and the prayers of the homeless  
will be answered. Ps 102.17 CEV*

The phrase “*prayers of the homeless*” caught my attention this week. I worked with the homeless in Nashville for nine years. I thought of the many times I prayed with the homeless and their many needs. Every story was different, but most of the situations I encountered fell into one of several categories. The first were those who were deep in addiction to alcohol, meth, crack or some other drug. They were owned by their addiction and couldn't stay focused on anything except getting the next high and obtaining the means to purchase their drug. Sometimes they would pray to be released from their addiction and sometimes I believe they truly desired that release.

The second group I considered the “hard-core” homeless. These people had somehow lost the art of living in what we would call “normal society.” They did not necessarily prefer to be homeless, although I'm pretty sure some did. They had simply forgotten how to live in a home and support themselves with steady jobs. The world seemed too complex to handle. A lot of the people I met who were in this category were veterans. For whatever reason, they failed to make the transition from military life to civilian life. Some claimed to be combat veterans from Viet Nam, the Gulf, Iraq or Afghanistan. I had no way of checking their histories. These people most often asked for prayers for their families who had either disowned them or from whom they were estranged.

An unsettling number of the homeless were mentally disturbed. In a different era they would have been cared for, however inadequately, by the State. Now they are left to their own devices to wander the streets, attempting communication with a world that they cannot seem to comprehend. Their prayer requests were often incomprehensible, mumbled too low to hear or shouted with a ferocity that made others cringe away. When I speak of prayers that God hears that “cry from the heart” I often think of these people.

Finally, there were those who had fallen on difficult times. It might have been a loss of work, but too often it was accident, injury or illness. When you most need such things as health insurance, a living wage and the security of a home, the condition that creates those needs can also destroy the source of the benefit. As the years went on, I started to see more families living out of cars or in tents. The children would not meet my eyes, humiliated to be part of a family that could not support itself, yet in despair for their parents as well. The toddlers couldn't really remember another time but were learning what it meant to be hungry and cold. These people would pray for better lives but in reality, they were begging to be let back in; to be allowed to live as they once knew; to be allowed to live as we live.

Our faith tradition, based upon the teachings of Jesus and countless passages of scripture call upon us to be part of the answer to the prayers of the homeless.

*You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me. Matt 26:11 CEV*  
*(<sup>11</sup> There will always be some Israelites who are poor and needy. That's why I am commanding you to be generous with them. Deut 15:11 CEV)*

Some Christians treat the words of Jesus in Matthew 26:11 as a license to ignore the plight of the poor and homeless. “After all, isn't Jesus saying that trying to care for the poor and homeless is a hopeless task?” Actually, the answer is no. Jesus is saying just the opposite. He is reminding the disciples of the teachings of Moses that there will always be a need to care for those who are poor and homeless. There is time for both the worship of God in praise and thanksgiving and the worship of God through caring for those around us who are in need. See also Isaiah 58:6-8.

## **Bible Study**

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We are currently studying the Book of Joshua. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study. We meet from 10:00 to 11:30 on Thursday mornings.

I believe that the study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

## **Disciple Bible Study Opportunity**

Disciple Bible Study is a 32 week study of the bible from Genesis to Revelation. It has guided many people to a deeper understanding of scripture and their faith over the years. Many in the Church have completed this study.

I have been approached by two people who would be interested in a Disciple Bible Study to meet from 7:00 to 9:00 on Thursday evenings. I would like to get at least five more people to participate in this study. If you have considered undertaking a study of the bible before, this is a wonderful opportunity. If you are interested in being a part of this group, please contact me.

## Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

## Up-Coming Sermons

**May 4th: Christian Essentials: *It's All About Christ.*** We are called Christian for a reason. Our faith is based upon the act of God in becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. Yet it seems to me that, at times, we make our faith more about ourselves than about Christ. My texts are Philippians 2:5-8 and John 1:1-5, 14.

**May 11<sup>th</sup>: Christian essentials: *We Worship God, Not the Bible.***

## **Worship Leaders Schedule**

### **May 4**

Rachel Newman, **Liturgist**

Dawn & Richard Stevens, **Greeters**

Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

### **May 11**

Marty Bauguess, **Liturgist**

Tom & Julia Moore, **Greeters**

Jeanne Rybolt & Linda Robinson, **Ushers**

## **Announcements**

Please consider being a volunteer in the nursery. There is an opportunity each Sunday for you to be blessed by spending time with the youngest among us. Both men and women are welcome to be a part of this ministry. Please let Julia know of your interest.

The dates for serving at **61<sup>st</sup> United Methodist Church** are **May 24, August 16, November 15**. These occasions are all Saturdays. Volunteers are needed on these occasions. You will be blessed as you serve.

There are sign-up lists on the Bulletin Board for volunteers who will prepare communion as well as hosting the First Sunday meal. Please sign up!

## **May Birthdays**

**Tommy Cotton, Sam Richardson, Jim Winton**

**Happy Birthday to each of you!**