



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology Understanding Baptism (Part II)

¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. 1 Cor 1:14-17 NRSV

Paul's frustration with his congregation at Corinth comes through loud and clear. He believed that he had explained what Baptism was about but, arguing among themselves and seeking to prove which of them was better, the congregation had turned Baptism into a status symbol dependent upon who had done the baptizing. This dispute foreshadows the conflicts to come. In his book *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church*, Professor of Theology Lawrence Hull Stookey recounts the experience of a young woman born into a Christian family in England:

... Lucille ... was taken by her maternal grandmother to the local Wesleyan chapel to be baptized. Lucy's father, a sturdy Anglican, was skeptical about the whole proceeding since the Church of England does not regard Methodist Clergy as being in the apostolic succession. So he took Lucy to the Anglican parish church where she was baptized again. Now, Lucy's Mother was a convert to the Salvation Army and didn't think much of either the Wesleyans or the Anglicans. So she took Lucy to the local citadel for presentation under the banner of blood and fire ___ the Salvationist counterpart to baptism.

In time the family emigrated to the Midwestern United States. The community they moved into had neither an Episcopal church nor an Army Citadel; so the family attended the Methodist church. As a teenager, Lucy joined a class of those preparing to take the vows of church membership. Now it happened that the pastor was one of those mavericks who looks upon the practices of the denomination with disapproval, and regards the baptism of infants as a misguided tradition. He therefore decreed that all in the class had to be "truly baptized" at the font on the day of their vows. Lucy's mother discovered what was afoot and said, "Absolutely not. Three times is enough for anyone." But Lucy was a good psychologist and knew that, once her mother was seated in the Church, she would not make a scene. When the rest of the group went to the font, so did Lucy!

Now, it came to pass that some years later Lucy fell in love with, and married, a southern Baptist, ___but not without extracting from him a pledge that she not be baptized yet again. He agreed that she was quite sufficiently initiated into the church, and all was well ___until they moved to a community where they attended

a Baptist Church that was in need of a pianist. Lucy loved to play and seemed to be a providential gift to the congregation. But, ruled the deacons solemnly and steadfastly, unimmersed hands may not play the Lord's songs for us. And so, for the fifth time, Lucy was initiated into Christ's church. Stookey, Lawrence Hull, *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church* (Abington Press, Nashville 1982) pp 11-12.

Lucy's history highlights the major areas of dispute among the Christian traditions concerning baptism: the affiliation of the tradition into which you are baptized, infant verses professing baptism and immersion versus pouring or sprinkling. Keeping in mind the fundamentals of baptismal theology discussed in last week's article, let's look at each of these disputes.

Recall that United Methodist theology views baptism as an outward sign of the Grace of God that adopts us as God's children. Because it is an acknowledgement of the act of God, human inadequacies of belief or sin cannot interfere with the act of God. Thus, the early Church recognized those baptized in heretical Christian traditions as well as by priests who had been found guilty of morally reprehensible behavior. Put another way, it is not possible for human beings by intent, moral failings or accident, to prevent God's grace from adopting someone. Thus, the actions of Lucy's mother and father, based upon the perceived inadequacies of British Methodism or the Anglican Church, were ill founded. Lucy's original baptism was quite sufficient and would be recognized by the United Methodist Church today. The United Methodist Church recognizes all Christian baptisms, even if the tradition in question would not recognize a baptism performed in the United Methodist Church.

The issue of infant baptism is a bit more difficult and has existed almost from the beginning of Church history. Beyond question, based upon written descriptions of the liturgical practice, most early church congregations practiced infant baptism. The formula was to baptize the children of the adults who were baptized. In the earliest days of the Church it seems that whole households were baptized, including servants and slaves. Some congregations, however, declined to baptize infants. The reason for this often stemmed from different approaches to scripture and concerns about the free will of the person being baptized.

The New Testament does not specifically authorize infant baptism. Nor does it condemn infant baptism. Some groups contend that any act not specifically authorized by the New Testament is inappropriate. Others take the view that an act not specifically prohibited by the New Testament, and not inconsistent with the Gospel, is allowed. Thus, it was recognized in the early church that the baptism of infants and others who could not speak for themselves was appropriate if there was a community of Christians of which the infant was a part. It was incumbent upon that community of Christians to raise the infant in the faith until such time as they could confess their faith for themselves.

Others still maintained that one should not be baptized until they were old enough to understand the nature of the vows being taken. The focus here is on personal responsibility. That idea sounds good but often fails in practice. Traditions practicing "believer baptism" have been known to baptize very young children who likely did not comprehend what they were professing. Additionally, what about those persons who through birth defect, disease or injury, could not answer for themselves? Isn't our theology of God too small if they are denied baptism? From a Wesleyan perspective, believer baptism places too much emphasis on the act of the individual professing their faith and not enough upon the grace of God.

Finally, there is the manner in which the water is used. Many people assume that, since the New Testament most often refers to Jesus coming up out of the water, Jesus must have been immersed by John the Baptist:

⁹ *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* ¹⁰ *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.* ¹¹ *And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”* Mark 1:9-11
NRSV

⁹ *And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.* ¹⁰ *And straightway **coming up out of the water**, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:* ¹¹ *And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* Mark 1:9-11 KJV

⁹ *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* ¹⁰ *Just as Jesus was **coming up out of the water**, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.* ¹¹ *And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”* Mark 1:9-11 NIV

However, the Greek phrase being translated does not require Jesus to have been immersed. It can refer to his leaving the river. For instance:

⁹ *About that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River.* ¹⁰ *As soon as Jesus **came out of the water**, he saw the sky open and the Holy Spirit coming down to him like a dove.* ¹¹ *A voice from heaven said, “You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you.”* Mark 1:9-11 CEV

People also find justification for immersion in Paul’s letter to the Romans that equates being baptized to be buried with Christ. See Romans 6:4.

The Church record, however, as well as preserved Churches containing baptismal pools and fonts indicates that the Church through the centuries has used full immersion in water, pouring water and sprinkling water to baptize. From a theological perspective, the water is simply a symbol of the power of God to cleanse us from our sins. Just as the sin of the person performing the ritual does not interfere with the baptism nor does the manner in which the rite is performed so long as the intent is to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; in other words to baptize the individual into the church. In the United Methodist tradition, any of the three forms, immersion, pouring or sprinkling may be used. The most powerful use of the symbol of water is immersion, but it is not a necessity.

We do not re-baptize. Since baptism is a symbol of a covenant God has already made, adopting us as God’s own, re-baptism is equivalent to asking God to make the covenant again. It’s as if we are saying that what God did the first time didn’t “take” or that God has somehow broken the covenant. We do, however, allow for a reaffirmation of our baptismal vows in a liturgy that calls upon us to remember our baptism. Since I have been at Trinity we have renewed our baptismal vows at least twice a year. Also, should anyone feel a need to reaffirm their faith and their commitment to God, please contact me and we will offer that opportunity during an upcoming worship service.

Scholarships to Cedar Crest Camp

Bishop William McAlilly has issued a call to United Methodists throughout the TN Annual Conference to contribute to the 99+1 Fund for scholarships for children to participate in our camping ministry at the Cedar

Crest Camp. Remembering Jesus's parable about the shepherd seeking after the lost sheep, our goal this year is to fund 100 (99+1) scholarships given to allow TNUMC kids to experience the love of Christ through camping. There are two ways that Bishop McAlilly and the Camping and Retreat Ministries team are asking for participation:

1. To recruit at least one child from your church to participate in a faith forming camp experience at Cedar Crest Camp this summer.
2. To raise funds to provide one \$300 scholarship for a child who could otherwise not attend camp.

Please send all scholarship funds to:
The Bishop's Cedar Crest Scholarship Fund
C/O The Rev. Dickie Hinton
P.O. Box 414
Monterey, TN 38574

More information on this important program can be found at <http://cedarcrestcamp.org/> or by emailing camp director Russell Casteel at russell.casteel@tnumc.com.

Easter Sermon Series

Christian Essentials

On Easter Sunday I started a new sermon series called "Christian essentials." The first Sunday I preached on the Resurrection. The second Sunday in Easter I preached on the subject "Doubt is Good." The third sermon in the series was titled "It's All About Christ." This series will continue through the next three 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 (2nd Sunday in Easter)
It's all About Christ (3rd Sunday in Easter)
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.

*¹⁰ Some of you were prisoners
suffering in deepest darkness
and bound by chains,
¹¹ because you had rebelled
against God Most High
and refused his advice.
¹² You were worn out
from working like slaves,
and no one came to help.
¹³ You were in serious trouble,
but you prayed to the LORD,
and he rescued you.
¹⁴ He brought you out
of the deepest darkness
and broke your chains. Ps 107:10-14 CEV*

The psalms speak of a time around 3000 years ago. So we know that the concept of locking people away in prisons for their crimes is an ancient one. Also, what person looking at the violence of society can help but believe that some people will simply never be able to live outside of a prison without committing violence on the innocent. Still scripture and especially the Gospel speaks of the possibility of redemption for the prisoner.

¹⁶ Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, ¹⁷ he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read, ¹⁸ “The Lord’s Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, ¹⁹ and to say, ‘This is the year the Lord has chosen.’ ” Luke 4:16-19 CEV

Jesus is preaching from the Book of Isaiah and tells the people of Nazareth that he has come, in part, to announce “freedom for prisoners.” Our nation holds about five percent of the world’s population, but we hold more than twenty percent of the world’s prison population. We routinely place non-violent offenders in prison, sometimes for decade long sentences. We have also allowed the keeping and housing of prisoners to become a business with the result that some have abused the power to incarcerate to make a profit. In Matthew 25:36 et.seq., Jesus calls us to be in ministry to those who are in prison. Perhaps it’s time that the church in the United States took a closer look at our prison system.

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 11th: Christian essentials: *We Worship God, Not the Bible.* As United Methodists we believe that scripture contains all that is necessary to know for our salvation. We believe scripture is the inspired word of God and that, through prayerful study of the scripture, we can hear God's Word for our lives. However, if we aren't careful, we can find ourselves turning the bible into an idol that we worship. My texts are Psalm 119:96-105 and 2 Peter 3:14-18.

May 18th: Christian essentials: *God Will Not Leave You Behind.* If you asked a non-Christian what Christians believed it's likely that a significant number would refer to something called the Rapture and to a time when God will punish the world with something called the tribulation. Yet, these beliefs represent a tradition of a small group of Christians who are espousing a theology developed by a Scotsman in the late 19th century. In reality this theology has little to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we understand it. My texts are John 3:16-17 and Genesis 1:26-31.

Worship Leaders Schedule

May 11

Houston Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Tom & Julia Moore, **Greeters**

Jeanne Rybolt & Linda Robinson, **Ushers**

May 18

Renita Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**

Sam Richardson & Tommy Cotton, **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 **61st 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!