

# Acts 2:29-41 Early Morning

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[0:00] O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight. O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Amen. Please have a seat. For those of you I haven't had the privilege to get to know, my name is Ryan Spear and I serve as a curate here at St. John's.

It's kind of like a pastoral apprentice. If you want to keep your Bibles open to page 959, we'll be spending our time this morning in 1 Corinthians, or as an American, as I refer to it, 1 Corinthians, in case you're wondering where that is.

Today is a baptism Sunday. At the 10 a.m. service, Eden and Ruth Gray will be baptized, the daughters of Will and Jordan. Now, our two readings for today in Acts and in 1 Corinthians both teach us about the place baptism in the church.

Now, our focus this morning will be on just two things, baptism and unity and baptism and belonging. So first, we're going to unpack 1 Corinthians together and look at it particularly.

[1:13] And in the second half, we'll reflect on what this passage teaches us about baptism more broadly. So first, baptism and unity. Now, the main idea here in 1 Corinthians 12 is this.

Through baptism, we are united in and as the body of Christ. United in and as the body of Christ. Now, the central problem for the Corinthians here is division.

Who is more spiritual? Who's number one? Who has had the best name associated with their baptism? And this is why at the very, very beginning, Paul gets right to the heart of the issue in 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

He says, were you baptized in the name of Paul? They're divided and they have distorted views of what it means to be truly spiritual. So what Paul is doing here in our chapter, verses 12 through 14, he's reminding them of their oneness.

Now, look how many times in just these three verses he talks about being one. Verse 12, just as the body is one, though many are one body.

[2:24] Verse 13, one spirit, one body, one spirit. Verse 14, notice the switch from one to many. Clearly, the emphasis is on their oneness.

In the context of their dividing over their giftedness, he's recentering them. Their unity is his main concern. Now, we're going to look at three points here.

Who their unity is found in, how this unity is brought about, and what this unity accomplishes. Who, how, and what.

So first of all, who their unity is found in. As he begins verse 12, just as a body is one, so it is with Christ.

Now, the church here is presented not as a body of Christians, but as the body of Christ. Not a body of Christians, but the body of Christ.

[3:22] Now, this is kind of a Sunday school answer. Unity, Jesus, seems to make sense. But it's actually not what you might expect Paul would have said. You might have expected him to say that it's the church.

So is the church. But he doesn't say the church. He says, so it is with Christ. Now, he's pointing here to something profound. He's saying, and in one sense, you're not an organization.

You're an organism. You're something alive. With Christ as the head. You're a living member. As one commentator put it, The church is the means whereby Christ reveals himself on earth.

And becomes incarnate in the world through his spirit. Revealing Christ. Christ becoming incarnate in our midst. And this is the first and most foundational part of unity.

Joined into Christ as living members. So how they are unified always starts with who they are unified into.

[ 4 : 30 ] Now, secondly, how is this unity brought about? How do they enter into this life of Christ? Paul says it's brought through baptism in one spirit.

Notice Paul just says you were baptized. He did not say believe because they go together. He's not about setting up a stage process of how you get from point A to point B.

He assumes that belief precedes or is anticipated in baptism. Now, most importantly, it's an objective past tense fact.

They were literally and physically baptized. Now, the curious expression here is drink of one spirit.

One commentator puts it. This word here can reference a lot of other images.

It's a word here of being drenched in, plunged in, saturated, imbued, or submerged. It's an image of the overflow of God's grace. Another commentator put it this way.

[ 5 : 34 ] Jesus is the baptizer. And the spirit is the person in which one is plunged at baptism.

Remember, at the beginning of Corinthians, they were debating, I follow Apollos.

I follow Paul. Paul here is recentering them. It's all in Jesus. It's all in the spirit. Now, I think Paul here is getting to the mystery of baptism by combining references to the spirit and to water.

We are baptized through the symbol of water. As the water is on us, we ask by faith for God's spirit to be in us and accomplish through us what water symbolizes.

A washing, a cleansing, a joining of Christ in his death and resurrection and beginning new life in him. It's a grace because it's entirely of God's own doing.

And our baptism is effective because Jesus was baptized. Something we receive because what Jesus has done, what he's done ultimately on the cross.

[ 6 : 41 ] And God, in his abundant grace, gives us the water so that we can have the benefits of the cross. We see the cross of Christ reflected in the water of baptism.

So that's how it's accomplished. Through baptism, through joining Christ. Through accepting for ourselves what we could not do for ourselves. Finally, what unity accomplishes.

So first, it's found in Christ. Secondly, it's through the spirit. And finally, what it accomplishes is that we become neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free.

So not only does this join them together as one in the body of Christ, it takes priority over how the world separates into categories of privilege, position, and power.

It's part of what these terms communicate. Whether it's cultural position. Whether it's position based on power. Paul here is saying this baptism has entirely reoriented your horizontal relationship with one another.

[ 7 : 51 ] Because it's reoriented your vertical relationship with Christ. So this is our baptism. It's our unity in Christ. It's Paul's main concern in this chapter about their divisiveness and arguing over who's better.

What's gifts are more superior than others. Where the gifts come from. He's recentering them in Christ. Now there are debates about baptism. Maybe this is a friendly crowd, not a hostile crowd. But there are debates. About what baptism is more effective. What baptism is better. We might hear Paul saying something similar to us today. For those who might have particularly strong opinions or attitudes about what baptism is, who it's for, and how it's accomplished.

We might hear ourselves say things like, Well, I think my baptism is better. Because the water, you should have seen the water. It's pristine. It's beautiful. My baptism is better. Or, well, my baptism is better.

Because you should have seen the place where it happened. Or the method. Or the words that were said. But Paul here is referencing, it's about our unity in Christ. It's about who does it. He might say, it's all the same water.

[ 8 : 58 ] Because it's all the same spirit. Placing our confidence in the one we're baptized into. Not in how and who we're baptized by. In our worldly context here.

So that's unity. That's our togetherness in Christ through baptism. What Paul is recentering them. One commentator said he's not here arguing so much for baptism, but from it.

All of the implications in our life that we can derive from our identity as baptized believers in Christ. Now our second half, as we close, will be about our belonging in baptism.

Now in the Anglican tradition, infants are invited in the context of the faith of the parents to participate in baptism. I mention this because Ruth and Eden are the toddler and infant daughters of Will and Jordan.

Now but this isn't an exception in the Anglican tradition. It's how it's embraced for the entire community. Adults and for children. Now as someone who helpfully explained this to me, in this tradition, we belong in order to believe.

[10:06] Not so much believe in order to belong. The emphasis is on belonging. Now the covenant, the key here is covenant. And you're probably hearing a bit here about my own journeys I think thought through these things.

Wasn't the background I grew up in. So you might be hearing some of that as I locate myself and thought through this recently. But what really helped and what the text communicates, and we heard this in Acts, is the idea of entering into God's promises.

It's God's movement towards humanity in grace that is emphasized. All the way back to Genesis, we see God making promises and inviting whole families to partake of his grace.

Our reading from Acts states this. This promise is for you and for your children. And remember, covenants came with responsibilities. They were to be lived out.

A covenant wasn't a reward earned by good behavior, but a grace and a promise made to empower faithful living. And remember, what God ultimately desires is the conditions of our hearts.

[11:14] He said he longs for his law to be written on our hearts, not on tablets of stone. It's the same as true of baptism. It's a symbol, a sign, and a seal of our belonging in Christ's new covenant community.

Now I'm going to use an analogy here. And the thing with every analogy is it breaks down when you start to look at it too closely. So let's try to stay zoomed out. But the covenantal aspect of baptism is like receiving a check for a large amount of money.

Now for the adult, receiving the check in some ways is the gift of salvation. You haven't earned it, but you've received this by grace through faith.

Faith is the confidence not in you and your ability to cash it, but in the one who has written the check, right? It's not in the paper the check was written on, whether it's high quality paper or not. It's in the person it's being received from. And so in one sense, baptism represents signing the back of the check, coming forward, coming to the bank, saying, I believe this person is good for it.

[12:22] But I'm going to take this to the bank, sign the back, and say, I'm going to invest this and live, and live in light of this richness I've received. Now for the infant, receiving the check is the anticipation of salvation.

I don't think it would be terribly wise to hand an infant a check, like an actual check. If your kids were anything like mine, if you've had kids, they'd probably think, this is fun paper and maybe tear it up or make paper airplanes out of it.

No, the check is written for the infant, but it's entrusted in the community of adults, under their guidance and faith. The hope is that children will come into their own as they mature one day and accept these promises, this check, as their own.

So it's an anticipation of signing and depositing it at a later date. So you could say quite accurately that this child is already rich. Of course, the recipient might depart from this inheritance, but through baptism we seek to claim Christ's promises for us, for our children.

We place our children in his care and accept them into his body, the church, belong in order to believe. So in one sense, baptism for an adult is for a faith that is already activated.

[13:38] For the infant, the faith of the parents is the active ingredient that we pray through grace will one day be activated in the child. This is what baptism is about, unity and belonging.

So if you're not yet baptized today, I do invite you to start a conversation with a minister. And for those of us with loved ones who have been baptized but are not walking according to God's promises, we pray that through the Holy Spirit they would remember their baptism, and that the Holy Spirit would stir up in them the desire to let the waters of baptism flow in them.

For those who have been baptized, remember your baptism. Paul, remember, used the past tense, we were baptized.

J.I. Packer in a little pamphlet on baptism conveys a story that when Martin Luther would experience particularly intense temptation, he would think, pray to himself, baptizatus sum, I have been baptized.

We remember our baptism in two ways. Who we are, our identity. We have been made new and are united in Christ as his body, the church.

[ 14 : 59 ] We are a new creation. And secondly, whose we are. Paul says elsewhere, it is no longer I that live, but Christ in me who wills and works for his good pleasure.

Amen.