

Acts 2:29-41 PM

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 November 2024

Preacher: Rev. Jacob Vandiver

[0 : 00] Pray with me as we stand. Father God, I pray your word would instruct us tonight and help us to grow in understanding and love of you.

In Christ's name, amen. Please be seated. If I've not had a chance to meet you, my name is Jacob. I'm one of the ministers here at St. John's.

And today is a baptism Sunday. This morning, we baptized Eden and Ruth Gray, the little twin girls of Will and Jordan.

And it was a beautiful service if you didn't get to be there. And because it's a baptism Sunday, we're taking this opportunity to have sort of a one-off sermon on baptism.

So all of your questions about baptism will be answered in the next 20 minutes or so. So just strap in. But before I get into it, I want to give just a little preface to what we're going to be talking about tonight.

[1 : 02] I need to just say a couple of things to help frame our thoughts on baptism. I want to say just two things about what it means to be a human being.

And since you all are human beings, I hope these things are fairly obvious. But I want them to be in the front of our minds. So here we go. Thing number one about being a human being.

To be a human is to have an internal and an external life. The internal is the invisible and the spiritual.

Our thoughts, our desires, our feelings, our emotions. And the external is the visible, the physical. Our bodies and all the stuff that we do.

The internal and the external aspects of us are distinct, but they are inseparable. What goes on in our minds affects our outward behavior and vice versa.

[2 : 08] What happens outside of us affects our internal state of mind and our spiritual life. So the internal and the external are a unity, but they are distinct.

Okay. That's thing number one. Thing number two is that because we're both internal and external creatures, we use metaphors to communicate.

So metaphors refer to physical things to express invisible realities. And we use metaphors constantly to communicate.

For example, when a friend is explaining something really complicated to me and I finally get it and I say, Oh, I see what you mean. That's a visual metaphor, right?

It communicates that I understand, which is invisible, but it connects it with the physical sense of sight.

[3 : 13] See what I mean? We can't get away from using metaphors. It's just how we communicate as human beings. Okay, one more thing. Maybe more importantly, we as people use metaphors even more when we want to communicate something that is meaningful.

If you saw Will and Jordan at the baptism this morning as they were watching their girls be baptized, you would say that they were beaming with joy. Because it's meaningful, we need a metaphor.

Here's my point. Metaphors are how we communicate because we're both internal and external creatures. And the more meaningful an experience is, the more we need a metaphor to express it. So metaphors communicate reality. The reason I'm saying all of this is because this is how it is with the sacraments.

The sacraments are visible signs and symbols that manifest reality to us. You could say that they're physical metaphors. So sacraments, because they're metaphors, have both an invisible and a visible part.

[4 : 39] So to understand baptism, which is what we want to do tonight, we have to understand both parts, the visible and the invisible. So two points. The invisible internal part of baptism.

And point number two, the visible external part of baptism. Let's get into it. So point number one, the invisible part of baptism.

And this is what the Apostle Paul is talking about in the 1 Corinthians passage that we have. If you don't have that in front of you, it's on page 959 of the Pew Bible.

It's 1 Corinthians 12, verses 12 and 13 is what I'll look at. So in this passage, well, in chapter 12 as a whole, just to give us a bit of context, Paul is addressing a division in the church about spiritual gifts.

And he's telling the Corinthians that all Christians are unified because they are empowered by the same spirit.

[5 : 49] That's what he's trying to tell the Corinthians in chapter 12. And in verses 12 and 13, Paul is giving them the theological underpinning for that argument.

And the way that he expresses that theological principle is by using two metaphors. He uses these to explain how and why we are unified.

Okay, so what does he say? Look with me. Verse 12. For, so Paul is explaining the previous 11 verses. He says, For, the body is one and has many members.

And all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body. So Paul is using the metaphor of a body. He's saying, All of you Corinthians, you're individuals, and you each have individual bodies and particular spiritual gifts, but you're all part of one body.

Okay. And this metaphor is not original to Paul. It had been used by many ancient thinkers to describe groups of people.

[7 : 08] And we still use this language today, don't we? We talk about the body politic, to refer to political bodies or national bodies. It's a common metaphor for describing people in society.

But, the apostle Paul does something very strange. You'd expect him in verse 12 to say, Just as the body is one and has many members, so it is with the church.

your organization, your social group. But that's not what he says. Look at the end of verse 12.

He says, So it is with Christ. So what is Paul saying here? He's saying that each of the Corinthians individually are all members of Christ's body.

This is the invisible body of Christ. It's made up of all people, past and present, who have believed and trusted in Jesus for salvation.

[8 : 24] Jesus, with his personal, physical, human body, is the head and each of the Corinthians are members of his body.

This is the body that Paul says that the Corinthians are part of. And that's the theological basis for their unity. And this means that while the Corinthians are part of a visible, social, organized body, their primary membership is in the invisible body of Christ.

Christ. So Paul is saying that the primary thing for being a Christian is being part of the body of Christ by being linked with Jesus, by being bound to him as closely as your head is bound to your body.

Being a Christian is not about how good of a person you are, having a heart of gold. It's not about how much good you can do in the world and it's not about what institution you're a member of.

As important as all those things may be. Being a Christian is about sharing in the life of God by being part of his body.

[9 : 56] Okay. So how do you become part of this invisible body of Christ? And this is what Paul explains in verse 13. Look with me.

He says, for, so he's explaining how this thing with the body works, for, in one spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether we're Jews or Greeks, slaves or free people, and all were made to drink of one spirit.

So he uses a second metaphor and this time the metaphor is water. The physical part is water and the invisible part is the spirit of God.

And with this metaphor he's picturing two things. He's saying that we're immersed into that water, that spirit, but we're also given that water to drink.

We're given that spirit to drink and it fills us. And again, this metaphor is not original to Paul. Paul is simply repeating Jesus.

[11 : 08] Jesus, Acts chapter 1 and lots of places in the New Testament, he says that his followers would be baptized, that they would be immersed in the Holy Spirit.

and so they were at Pentecost. And Jesus, in John's gospel, chapter 7, he says, listen, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. And John tells us that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit.

So Paul is saying, linking up to Jesus, being part of his body and sharing in his life, comes by believing in Jesus.

And we call this conversion. Being converted converted to Christ happens when we are surrounded by the transformative power of God's presence and love.

[12 : 23] And as you believe in Jesus, you receive the transforming power of his grace, which renews and renovates your internal life and causes you to be a source of God's grace to other people.

That is what it means to be a convert. That's how you become part of Christ's invisible body, Paul says.

And that's the invisible part of baptism. Okay, that's point number one. The invisible part of baptism is believing and trusting in Jesus to become part of his body.

And point number two is about the visible sign of baptism that we practice in the church. So remember, human life is made up of both invisible and visible stuff.

And the invisible stuff cannot stay invisible forever. The invisible has to be manifested to us in real time and space.

[13 : 41] this is just true of being a human in general. It's not a particularly religious thing to say. Let me give you an analogy. I'm an American and we've been in Canada for about three and a half years now and I may know in the deepest part of my heart and soul that I've had a conversion to Canadianism.

I may know that I am a Canadian. I love Canada. I want to be in Canada. There's no one more Canadian than me.

I'm sure because I've had an inward change. But if I were to go to the States and come back to the border border, the border guard would say, can I see your papers?

And he would ask me, what do you want to do in Canada? And I would say, well, I'm a Canadian. I've been converted. And he would tell me, well, I'm sir, I'm glad you feel that way, but it says here that you're an American citizen and you need to go back to America.

Of course, there's a whole series of steps to becoming a Canadian citizen. You have to get lots of other people involved. There's lots of paperwork to fill out.

[15 : 10] And there's even a ceremony that you have to go to and pledge allegiance to the king, and I think you even have to sing the national anthem or something. And only after all of that would I be really considered a Canadian.

Only then would my inward conversion be made manifest to the external world. This is just how human beings work.

And God knows this because he made us this way. So, any time that God promises to give us grace, any time he sets up a covenant with us, he gives us signs and ceremonies to mark when he gives us grace.

He gives us visible, tangible metaphors to communicate his grace to us. And covenant, if you don't know, is a biblical word.

It basically means an agreement or a promise between God and us that he will be gracious with us. And covenants are throughout the Bible and the Old Testament and in the New.

[16 : 28] And as Christians, we live under what we call the New Covenant in Jesus or the New Covenant of the Gospel. So, any time God sets up a covenant, he gives signs and ceremonies to us.

They mark when we come into the covenant and they mark when we receive the grace of the covenant anew. And this is what the sacraments are, baptism and Holy Communion.

So, sacramental baptism is the mark of entry into the New Covenant. It's a sign of the inward conversion of the heart that happens when we believe in Christ.

And outward baptism is the way that God's grace, which is invisible, is communicated to us in real space and in real time.

The outward sign of sacramental baptism is the place where the invisible and the visible come together. God's love is the forgiveness of God.

[17 : 44] The forgiveness of sin and our adoption into his family as his children by the Holy Spirit. It's here that these are signed and sealed upon us where we can see that it's true.

That's point number two. sacramental baptism is the outward communication of the inward grace of conversion. Okay, so now just as I finish up, I can anticipate at least two questions that might come up for you.

So, let me just try to address what I think may be coming up. First, it might be easy to think that I kind of really just need the inward thing, right?

Like, I kind of really just need to have an inward conversion in my heart. So, is outward baptism really necessary?

And the answer is yes. Outward baptism is generally necessary. There are exceptions.

[19 : 07] God is not bound to the outward sacrament of baptism. God surely saves people in all sorts of situations where they could not be made part of the visible church.

We see this in scripture, and the church has always recognized this, because God is in control. But these are exceptions that prove the rule.

So, why is baptism necessary? And it's pretty simple. Baptism is necessary because the church is the place where we grow up spiritually.

spiritually. The church is the only place where we can be fed and grow to become more like Jesus. You may understand this already, but we are not machines. You can't just flip a switch and be made like Jesus.

[20 : 16] Jesus Our life in Christ has to be nourished. It has to be nourished by God's word, by prayer, and by receiving the sacraments.

All of which happens in the church. While God can and does raise people to spiritual life outside of the church, baptism into the visible body is necessary because it's where we grow up into that new spiritual life.

The second question that might come up for you is why do we baptize babies? So we baptized Eden and Ruth, both of whom are one year old this morning.

And the reason that we baptize babies is because they are babies, they are children of faithful Christians. And this is the biblical model for how covenants and signs work.

So for those who are born into a covenant of God's grace, they receive the sign of the covenant before their inward conversion.

[21 : 39] But those who are converts to the covenant, they receive the sign after their profession faith. And again, we're not machines.

So baptism doesn't do a mechanical thing in the infant. But when we baptize children of faithful Christians into the church, the child is immersed into the life of God's covenant community, where his living word is proclaimed week by week, and where the fruits of the Spirit are at work in people's lives, baptism inducts the child into the community of salvation.

So we baptize infants with the holy expectation that God will work in their life, that he will bring them to faith, faith, that he will convert them inwardly so that they would receive their baptism with faith.

Okay, there's lots more to say about baptism. So if any of this has brought up more questions for you, I'll be around after the service, and I would love to chat about baptism or anything else.

So let me just finish by saying a few things. if you are a baptized believer, I want to invite you to consider how you have been adopted into God's family, how gracious it is that God has come to you and brought you into his body, how God's grace has given you a new identity in Christ.

[23 : 37] God's love. Consider how you share in the life of God by being part of his body, both invisible and visible. And second, if you're preparing for baptism, I also want you to consider how God is working in you and has worked in you, how he has saved you, how he has already made you part of his invisible body, and he's graciously wanting to bring you into the church, so that you can be made more into the image of Christ.

And if you've not been baptized, and if any of this has made you consider being baptized, I want you to consider what this means, and ask yourself, what is holding me back?

And just know that any sense that you have, that God is calling you to be baptized into the church, that's the Holy Spirit drawing you and inviting you to salvation.

If that's you, talk to me afterwards. And if you will, just join me as we pray to close. Father God, we thank you that you are the author of life, that you are the author of salvation, and that you are the author of baptism.

We thank you, Lord, that you have brought life through Christ, that all of us who are baptized into his name can rest in confidence that you have saved us, and that you will bring us to eternal life.

[25 : 30] Lord, I pray for those who are considering baptism, that you would continue to draw them to yourself, that you would convince them of your undying, unfailing, unconditional love for them, and that they would take the plunge, and that they would join your community of faith so that they could be more shaped into the image of Christ.

We ask all of this in his precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.