

Acts 2:29-41 AM

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0 : 0 0] Let us pray. Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen. So today's sermon is a bit of a one-off. So next week marks the beginning of Advent, and we're going to be doing an Advent Christmas series on the meaning of the Son of God becoming human.

But today, because it's a baptism service, we wanted to take the opportunity to talk about baptism. It's not a topic that we actually often preach on. And yet it was central to Jesus' ministry from the very beginning.

John the Baptist, right? He said, one is coming after me who is mightier than I, and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. And even in Jesus' great commission to his church, at the end of his ministry, he says, go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And so all throughout the New Testament, baptism is something that symbolizes our salvation in Christ, our adoption as God's children, and our initiation into the promises in the people of God.

[1 : 2 0] And according to the Christian faith, baptism symbolizes the total transformation that takes place in a person's life when they are gripped, when they are laid hold of by the grace of God.

So today, I'm kind of viewing this sermon as an opportunity for those of us who have been baptized and maybe have forgotten of the significance of our baptism to be reminded of it.

And also an opportunity for those of us who are preparing to be baptized to learn maybe a bit of the great significance of what we're going to be entering into. And then maybe for those of us who have never considered baptism at all to maybe have a think about what it could mean to follow Jesus and be baptized in his name.

So if you could join me, 1 Corinthians chapter 12, I think this is on page 959 of your Pew Bible. We're just looking at a few little verses here, and I must admit that when I originally chose this passage, I thought it was about water baptism.

And then upon closer look, over the course of this last week, I became convinced that it's not about water baptism. That it's actually about the kind of spiritual transformation that takes place when the spirit enters into a person's life and converts a person and brings them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 3 5] And then I woke up this morning, and I was thinking to myself, oh, I actually wonder if this is about water baptism. So all that is to say is I'm on a little bit of a circular journey, and I'm going to be inviting you into that circular journey.

And when we kind of back up and look at chapter 12 as a whole and try to contextualize these few shifty little verses, we realize that chapter 12 is not primarily about spiritual gifts, but about spiritual persons.

So what does it mean to be a spiritual person? And how does one become a spiritually alive, a spiritually awake person? And the answer that Paul gives is not a weekly routine of yoga and meditation and journaling and a monthly spa treatment.

He says the answer is the life-transforming presence of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. And this is really good news from the pen of the Apostle Paul.

Because what it highlights for us is that becoming spiritually awake and alive in the Lord Jesus is not something that you can just get a 10-step program in order to do.

[3 : 38] It's not something that you can achieve through great books and great learning or through doing lots of ministry and just doing, doing, doing, or through eloquence and talking the good talk and having all the answers.

Because all those things eventually make us more depressed about ourselves than we were at the beginning. Being a spiritual person, according to Paul, is about the gift and the work of the Holy Spirit in us from the beginning to the end of our lives.

So look at verse 12, or verse 1 of chapter 12 with me. Now concerning spiritual gifts, or it could be translated spiritual persons, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray in mute idols, however you were led. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says Jesus is accursed.

And no one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit. So J.I. Packer once talked about the Spirit being like a bright spotlight. The spotlight of the Spirit first shines on the human heart, this is verse 2, revealing its sewage and its sorrow and its idolatry.

[4 : 47] And then the great spotlight of the Holy Spirit shines on Jesus Christ, revealing his love and his lordship and his saving mercy. And no one can truly understand themselves, says Paul in these first three verses.

No one can truly know who they are and who the Lord Jesus is, except by the power and the work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So this is point number one. Becoming a spiritual person, according to Paul, starts with a conversion to Christ by the Spirit.

The second thing, though, is thriving as a spiritual person is sustained by immersion into the Spirit by Christ. So this happens at conversion as well.

We see this in verse 12 and verse 13. As the believer looks to Jesus as their Lord, Jesus fills the believer with the Spirit and places in them a well that they can draw from all their lives.

So verse 12, check this out with me. This is quite incredible. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body is talking about the church here. Though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

[6 : 02] Notice how you would expect Paul there to say, so it is with the church, or so it is with Christ's body, or so it is with the body of Christ. But he says Christ. Why does he just say Christ?

I think it's because he wants Christ to be the subject on our mind as we then go on to verse 13. In verse 13, it says, For we were all baptized in one spirit, into one body, and all made to drink of one spirit.

And the question is, who's doing the baptizing, and who's making us drink? I think for Paul, it's right at the end of verse 12. It's the Lord Jesus Christ himself who's doing the baptizing. This goes all the way back to Jesus' public ministry in John chapter 7.

He stood up in front of a crowd on a great festival, and he said, Whoever believes in me, as the scripture says, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. And John says, Jesus said that about the Holy Spirit.

So, I think what Paul is trying to show us here is that Jesus and the Spirit are inseparable. The Spirit does a transforming work in our lives so that we look at Jesus and we see him in a heart full of love and mercy and kindness for us.

[7 : 11] He is the Lord of our lives. And then Jesus gives the Spirit to his followers so that they would treasure in their hearts this love that he has for them, so that they would see as the hope and guidance of their lives his sovereignty over them.

So the Holy Spirit assures us that we belong to this Lord Jesus, that his grace applies to us and his forgiveness to all our circumstances, that he will hold us fast, and that he takes what Christ has done and applies it to us personally.

How many of you are interested in road cycling these days? Anybody interested in road cycling? I've got one person. That's good. Two. This year, I caught the bug for road cycling.

I'm a complete novice. So, over the summer, somebody asked me, he said, Hey, do you want to go climb Mount Seymour with me? And in my absolute ignorance, I said yes. And in my absolute ignorance, I set off with one water bottle and no food.

I was just fine until I reached the top of the mountain. And I discovered I had no water left, no food with me, and I had no energy, and I was barely able to make it home over the next hour and a half.

[8 : 24] It's what, in cycling terms, I completely bonked. That's the language for it. And on my way home, my friend patiently lectured me about the importance of nutrition for endurance.

He said, You don't have what it takes naturally to make it to the end. You need constant replenishing. And I think this is something that can happen to us, not just in cycling, but in our Christian lives.

In our zeal, we can start off with great ambitions of following the Lord Jesus, and we can go at it with full force, pedal to the metal, but ignorant or forgetful of how it is that we're going to be sustained for the long haul.

And we end up burning out. We end up bonking partway up the mountain. Paul says to us, Not only does becoming a spiritual person start with conversion to Christ by the Spirit, but thriving as a spiritual person, alive in Christ, is sustained by an immersion in the life of the Spirit by Jesus Christ.

And the third thing that he says to us here is he says, Living as a spiritual person requires being surrounded by the Spirit, composed and Christ-centered community.

[9 : 35] In other words, you have to be surrounded by the church. So look at verse 13 with me. He says, For in one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.

That's a reference to the church. Verse 14, For the body does not consist of one member, but of many. And this is a key aspect of what it means to be a Christian that Paul highlights and holds before us here in chapter 12.

You are not alone. You belong to a community. It is impossible to be a Christian alone. It is impossible to follow Jesus fruitfully and faithfully for the long haul alone.

You were never meant to be alone. That's part of the rich significance of why during the baptism service it says, Well, you who have kind of witnessed these vows do all you can to uphold these people and their commitment and their faith in Christ.

It's part of the reason why we gather every Sunday and we get in community groups and Bible studies and prayer gatherings and why we develop friendships within the life of the church because we need each other and that is integral to who we were created to be in Christ Jesus.

[10 : 45] I had a youth pastor growing up that once at the beach invited me over to the bonfire and I was about 15 years old and he said, Jordan, look at the fire.

And he took one of the coals with a stick and he flicked it out of the fire onto the sand. And he said, I want you to watch that coal. I was like, okay. So I watched that coal. About three minutes later my youth pastor said to me what happened.

And I said, I guess the coal cooled off. And he said, exactly. That's what happens to you and your faith if you separate yourself from God's people.

I think Paul is teaching us that when the spirit comes to dwell in us, when the spirit is at work in our heart, not only do we see the light of Christ and believe in his love for us and his lordship over us, not only are we united with him in his death and his resurrection and anticipate the future of glory that we will have with him, but we are united with all the believers that are united to that lord Jesus Christ.

At one and the same time the spirit brings us to Christ and places us into the church, surrounds us with brothers and sisters, some older, some younger.

[12 : 02] And a healthy faith, a healthy spiritual life, requires being spiritually indwelt and socially surrounded simultaneously. And this is marvelous.

As Paul goes on, he says, each of us have an essential part to play in the church. Each member of the body needs the other. No member of the body can say, because I'm not like you, I do not belong.

And no member of the body can say, because you are not like me, I do not need you. See, I think we're living in a culture where there is a resurgence of interest in spirituality.

I often talk to people who say, I'm not religious, but I like to think of myself as a spiritual person. All around us, people are searching and exploring.

It takes many forms. Crystal stores and metaphysical bookstores. Even children in my kids' classes that are interested in tarot cards and Ouija boards and playing with magic.

[13 : 04] There's the upper class meditation practices and yoga retreats. And there's also a whole host of interesting First Nation spiritualities where pursuing peace with nature is the way in which you encounter the spiritual world.

And in all these things, the human spirit, I think we see striving for something that it cannot achieve, searching for something that it cannot find, and thirsting for something that it has not drunk of.

And what Paul says to us is that only God the Holy Spirit can make you a truly spiritually alive and awake person. That only Christ can satiate that thirst that he has created in you for connection with God.

And it's only in the church that you can become who Christ has saved you to be. That make sense? Are you following so far? Now, I said at the beginning that I wasn't so sure if 1 Corinthians chapter 12 was about water baptism in verse 13.

Maybe it is, maybe it's not. But I think what is very clear is that everything that 1 Corinthians chapter 12 is about is symbolized and planted like a seed and sealed upon a person's life in water baptism.

[14 : 18] So, there's this wonderful article in the kind of formal Anglican confession of faith that talks about what baptism is about. And it says to us, I'm not going to read the whole thing because it's in quite Elizabethan English, but it gives us this litany of images that you heard in the liturgy, the baptism liturgy that we just had.

It says, baptism is a sign of new birth. It's a sign of being grafted into the church. It's a sign of the forgiveness of sins. It's a sign of adoption as God's children.

It's a confirmation of faith in the Lord Jesus. It's the increase of grace for the life and the spirit through prayer to God. It's all the blessings that God has for us in Christ Jesus are symbolized in this event of baptism.

Now, I want to end by having a few kind of pastoral, unpacking a few pastoral implications of this, but I know that many of you probably have the question on your mind, like, what's the deal with infant baptism? We just saw two one-year-old girls, beautiful, but one-year-old girls who cannot yet speak, although they were attempting to.

What's the deal with infant baptism in particular? And I don't have a bunch of time today to unpack this. You can ask Chris all your questions afterwards. But two quick comments. Just two things I want you to know.

[15 : 40] Infant baptism is about the continuity of the covenants, and it's about the priority of God's grace. So the continuity of the covenants in the Old Testament, God entered into a relationship with his people, said, I am your God, you are my people, and in order to put the sign upon you that you belong to me and I'm committed to you, I'm giving you the sign of circumcision.

And in the New Testament, I think you can see hints of this in Colossians 2 and in other places, you can see that the sign of the New Covenant is baptism. It is the sign that seals that we belong to God and that we are brought into his covenant purposes for his people.

That's why in Acts chapter 2 you get this sense that the promises of God are for us and for our children. And so God views the family as this unit where children can enter into the covenant community through baptism and be raised in faith from the earliest of their years, belonging in order to believe.

And so this means something very practical for us at St. John's. We do not treat the children of our church as if they are the children of the church of tomorrow. We treat the children of our church as if they are the children of today, the church of today.

The second thing is the priority of grace. Now, it's important to note here baptism is not magic. There's not something automatic about it. And baptism is also not just a public declaration of my personal faith.

[17 : 05] The focus of baptism is God's work in a person's life. The focus of infant baptism highlights the initiative of God in our salvation.

God lays hold of us before we can ever lay hold of Him. God reaches out to us in His sovereign mercy before we can ever reach out to Him. And by His grace, the gospel is planted in us like a seed.

It's the beginning of something revolutionary and significant, but it still needs sun and water and nurture and time to grow. And so the whole life of a child through teenagers into adulthood is seen as this slow and steady response to the gospel of faith as people are rooted and grounded in love like a mighty redwood tree.

So infant baptism, according to this conviction, beautifully exemplifies the central truth of Christianity as not primarily about what I do for the Lord. It is about what God has done for me.

and that He has laid hold of me. Now I want to end with just a few pastoral applications. A few pastoral applications.

[18 : 16] Remember, consider, and be. Remember your baptism. My brothers and sisters, some of you were baptized and you do not have a living memory of it because you were very young.

Others of you were baptized if you're like me, maybe when you were 10 years old, but you maybe think about it once every year or two. Remember your baptism. Baptism tells you who you are in Christ and who you are and whose you are in Christ.

It reminds you that you're not just the sum total of your latest kind of accomplishments or fears or failures or anxieties. It reminds you that you're not just the sum total of what other people have said to you or done to you however well-intentioned or malicious and you're not just the sum total of your internal desires and feelings and thoughts.

Baptism says who you are is who Christ has redeemed you to be. Who you are is defined by the fact that God has adopted you as his child and filled you with the Holy Spirit.

That your life is being held by the eternal promises of God for his eternal purposes. That you have been forgiven and freed and filled and fixed in his heart forever. So the great 16th century Christian Martin Luther he faced a fair bit of hostility in his life.

[19 : 40] He had many hard work weeks many discouraging weeks with his family and many dark nights of doubt and despair. Some people call it the dark night of the soul.

And he often wondered to himself should I just give up and give in? And it's said that Martin Luther in these times posted a little plaque in his room that said when you wash your face remember your baptism.

So that every time he got up in the morning to wash his face before he entered into the world and whatever who knows what he would encounter he would wash his face and remember that he had been washed. And then every time he came home at night no matter what he had accumulated or experienced being in the world that day he would wash his face and say remember your baptism that you have been washed.

And whenever he experienced those dark nights he would say I have been baptized and I am held by the promises of the almighty God. There was a woman in the church that I pastored in Southern California she was on the trustees in our church and she was such a joyful humble confident person around my age and I remember asking her one time like what made you this way?

And she said to me well God's grace but through my father she said every single morning as a teenager when I would be ready to go out the door and go to school my father would stop me at the door and say Megan remember who you are today.

[21 : 09] And he said that's just that gentle reminder every single day remember who you are in Christ today. This is the gift of baptism to us.

It helps us remember that our sails have been lifted and filled with the promises of God and when we remember it the Lord Jesus takes our feet from the miry clay and sets us on the solid rock of himself.

Remember brothers and sisters your baptism. Others of us need to consider baptism. Some of us have not been baptized but we have people here who are preparing for it which is wonderful young and old preparing for baptism because Jesus they've just discovered Jesus and they want to follow him and they want to know what that's about and they want to commit to him in the community and so they want to be baptized in the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit.

It's a thrilling thing. There have also been people in our congregation who have been Christians for a long time and never actually considered that they need to be baptized. Or maybe some people in our church that have children and they're soon to be baptized and this is an opportunity to consider the significance of what you will be doing.

What will this change mean for you and your children? Why do you want this for yourself or for someone else? What will you say no to in order to say yes to Christ?

[22 : 37] If you are considering baptism I encourage you to consider it a bit like a marriage. It is wonderfully joyful but it's not to be entered upon unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly. It marks the death of the old self and the birth of a completely new creation.

Christ lays total claim on us and we have to give all of ourselves to him. And finally, be baptized. Some of us need to remember, some of us need to consider, and some of us just need to be baptized.

We get in Acts chapter 2, repent and be baptized, says Peter on the day of Pentecost. Every one of you, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That's what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Our next baptism service is in May of 2025 or maybe June. April 27th.

Thank you, Will Gray. If you're interested and have any questions, please talk to Will Gray after the service. He'd be happy to answer them. Quite literally, he's in charge of the baptism preparation process.

[23 : 53] I just want to ask you a couple questions. If you consider yourself a Christian and you're not baptized, what are you waiting for? I ask that honestly.

And if you are exploring who Christ is, you haven't quite made a commitment to him, what is holding you back? And I ask that quite genuinely. According to Jesus, baptism is a tremendous gift because it marks the beginning of a new life.

It says your life from here on out is not about what you have done or left undone. It is about what God has promised you in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's about what he's giving you in the Holy Spirit.

and to be baptized is about opening the sails of your soul to be filled with his eternal purposes and his loving promises for all of your life until you see his face.

Brothers and sisters, remember your baptism. Consider your baptism. And maybe some of you here need to be baptized on April 27th, 2025.

[25 : 04] In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.