

Remembering Our Baptism

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Isaiah 43:1-7, Mark 1:4-11, 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

In a few moments Haley Ryan Gilbert will be presenting herself for baptism. This is something Haley very much wants to do. She loves Jesus and wants to follow him. And so we gladly offer her our prayers, our encouragement and our support. We rejoice with her and her family in this milestone moment of her young life.

Every baptism celebrated in the church ought to be an occasion to remember our own baptism. Whether we were baptized as infants or as adults, whether we have a memory of the actual event or not, the fact of our baptism ought to have continuing significance and impact upon our lives. It ought to be for us a source of continual strength and comfort. Baptism isn't just a one-time past event but an ongoing reality. We have a new identity in Christ. Every day we are to live out the meaning of our baptism. When we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God says to you and me: *"You are mine. I have called you my name. You are my beloved child. Follow me."*

To remember our baptism is to realize afresh that we belong not to ourselves but to God; Knowing that makes all the difference in the way we live:

To remember our baptism is to find new courage in the scary situations of life. If we truly belong to God, if we are God's own, we can be sure that no matter what frightening thing may come our way, God will not allow us to perish.

We just read a beautiful passage from the prophet Isaiah. The words refer to the people of Israel, but they can also apply to us, for we too are God's people: *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."*

What a wonderful promise! When you and I feel as though we are drowning in troubled waters, we can remind ourselves. *"I am baptized. I belong to you, Lord. You love me with an everlasting love. I know, Lord, that you will see through this."*

What security, what peace can come into our lives if we realize that! If I truly belong to God then *nothing*, not my worries, my pains, my fears, my sense of loneliness or depression, not the worst catastrophe that can happen to me, not death itself, can separate me from his love. God is the Lord of life and death, and no matter what may befall us, underneath us are his everlasting arms.

If, then, we face the frightening prospect of major surgery, we can remember our baptism and say to ourselves *"I belong to God."* If our lives seem to be coming apart at the seams, we can remember our baptism and say *"I belong to God. I am in God's hands, and nothing is ultimately going to harm me."* Comfort and courage come from remembering that.

One of the confessions of our church that comes from the time of the Reformation, the Heidelberg Catechism, begins with the question: *"What is your only comfort, in life and in death?"* The answer: *"That I belong--body and soul--not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation..."*

To remember our baptism is to receive new courage in the scary situations of life.

Secondly, to remember our baptism is to receive new strength for the tempting situations of life. The Tempter is always laying traps for us to get us to do wrong, to cause us to make the wrong moral choices in life. And if we forget who we are and to whom we belong, it's easy to give in - to our unhappiness and ruin.

After Jesus was baptized he was sent into to the wilderness where he felt the full force of temptation. Remembering his own baptism and knowing that he belonged to God his Father, must surely have kept him from being overwhelmed by Satan's power.

The Apostle Paul was writing to the Corinthian church of the dangers of giving in to temptation. Corinth at that time was "sin city" if there ever was one; it was known for its sexual promiscuity. Sexual lures were everywhere - prostitution was institutionalized. Some of the Christians were even trying to justify immoral behavior by saying to themselves that since their souls were saved by Jesus, it really didn't matter what they did with the body. Paul reminded them that their bodies as well as their souls belonged to God:

"What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price." "You are not your own," he said. "You are God's."

In other words, *"don't you realize you have been baptized into Christ?"*

It goes beyond sexual temptations, of course. When we are tempted to cheat or to lie, we can remember our baptism, saying 'I belong to God' and maintain our integrity despite the pressures to do otherwise.

When we are tempted to go against our better judgment and sin against another in word or deed, we can say "I belong to God" and do the right and loving thing instead. When kids at school are tempted by members of their peer group to get into drugs, they can say to

themselves: "I am a baptized Christian. I belong to God" and find a new group to hang around with.

In other words, in the tempting situations of life, we can and ought to remind ourselves who we are -- that we are children of God and that we were bought or redeemed at great price-- namely, the price of our Savior's blood. And that, therefore, to be "in Christ" is necessarily, to use Paul's words, "*to shun immorality.*" It is to live a new life and to leave the old sinful ways behind. In baptism, we have died to our old self. Since we belong to God, we are called to live for God. We are called to live out the meaning of our baptism.

Whenever Martin Luther was tempted to do wrong, he would put his hand over his head and say to himself, *'I am a baptized Christian. I am the Lord's.'* And invariably, he said, the devil would flee.

To say "I belong to God" is to find new strength to meet the tempting situations of life.

Then, too, to remember our baptism is to gain a new sense of personal responsibility for all of life and all of life's affairs. Everything that we are and have belongs to God: our souls, our bodies, our homes, our talents, our ambitions, our bank accounts, the whole earth...literally all of life we hold in trust for the God to whom they belong. We live as stewards of God's property. Life is not ours to squander – to waste. We are accountable to God for the life we live. And God has called us to share and to bless others....

Our baptism impacts the whole of life.

Coming to worship ought to be an occasion to remember our baptism. Actually, I have always liked the Catholic practice of keeping a small bowl of water at the entrance of the church – as worshippers come in, they put a little bit of water on their heads as a sign of blessing and as way to renew their baptismal commitment in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They remember who they are as they enter God's presence. I think the visual, physical reminder is helpful. Actually, it makes even more sense for worshippers to put water on their heads as they go out into the world – for there the battle is fought, for it is so easy forget who we are and whose we are.

Some churches – Presbyterian churches among them - have renewal of baptism ceremonies. I remember one worship service where the pastor came in with a bowl of water and a small branch. He proceeded to sprinkle water upon the congregation, saying "*Remember your baptism.*" Again, the physical, visual reminder...

Here's an idea: Perhaps when we get up in the morning we can have our own little baptismal renewal ceremony. As we go to the bathroom sink to splash water on our faces, we can pray at the same time, *'I am a baptized Christian. Lord, help me to live for you this day. Help me to remember I am yours!'* To do so is to find new courage for the scary situations of life; it is to have new strength for the tempting situations of life; it is to discover a new sense of responsibility for all of life.

Let us pray: *"Lord, we are thine, help us to know it, to know it in the depth of our heart and to act accordingly, through Christ our Lord." Amen.*