



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for January 31, 2021
“Old Habits/New Habits: Baptism”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Acts 2:36-41

Stuck in a Rut

Wednesday night was quite the night weatherwise. All day long the predictions were for snow showers. The snow showers came and then some. They also came at a most inopportune time, right around the evening rush hour. Travel was treacherous and slow-going. It was really hard to make your way.

My wife, Cheryl was caught in that. She stopped in Kroger on her way home from work and from there it took her an hour to get to the entrance to our neighborhood. She couldn't get up the steep hill into our neighborhood, so she very carefully left the car just off the road in front the entrance. That night after the snow had passed, I attempted to get the car the last little bit back to the house. It was not to be.

The more I tried the deeper the rut. It was just too wet and snowy to get the car moved without help. The next day our son, John and I gave it a try. It was no easy effort, but we eventually made it.

It is tough getting yourself out of a rut once you have yourself dug in.

The interesting thing about ruts is that you can get in them before you even realize it. That's why it is so important to consider the habits that make up our everyday lives. We have been trying to do that over the past few weeks. We have considered those habits we need to keep and those we need to get rid of. We have most especially considered those habits we need to take on.

We have particularly put our focus on those habits that have to do with our interior life. When the heart is right, then all else falls in line. If our relationship with God is strong, then we are able to meet our life, regardless of what we face.

To date, we have talked about the “*holy habits*” of prayer, Bible study, and worship. Just last week, we talked about what it means to develop the “*holy habit*” of “*servant leadership*.” All along we have sensed God stretching us.

Today, we consider the “*holy habit*” of baptism. As with the other habits we have been talking about, it too has the potential to draw us closer to God.

Let's hear then from God's word. We read today from Acts 2:36-41.

Acts 2:36-41

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, 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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Ready to Respond

Upon the rush of the mighty wind of God's Spirit at Pentecost, Peter took to preaching. He broke into a Spirit-filled witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That sort of preaching was characteristic of the Early New Testament Church.

Every good sermon should include a rousing conclusion and Peter's was no different. It should offer a good dose of challenge and even a call for decision. Peter's did that. Those who listened to Peter that day were ready to respond. As the scripture says, *"They were cut to the heart."* They were ready to give themselves to Christ.

"What shall we do?" they asked upon hearing Peter. And Peter responded by saying, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Acts 2:38

Peter left it with his hearers to respond and respond they did. Three thousand people were won that day to the Kingdom. Those who heard that day were called on to repent and be baptized, and with that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Repent

Those who gathered that day were challenged to repent. They were challenged to make an about face and seek the Lord and his forgiveness. Headed in one direction away from God, those who listened to Peter that day were asked to turnaround and head God's way.

Peter was not the only one who spoke of repentance.

- John the Baptist was quick to say, *"Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand."*
- Jesus was all about turning people's lives around. He was all about pointing people toward God.
- Paul preached repentance, if anyone did.

The Greek word for repentance is *"metaneo,"* which has to do with changing the disposition of our hearts and minds. The call to repentance is the call to be transformed.

Paul writes in Romans 12:2, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

Paul also writes in II Corinthians 5:17, *"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed; see, everything has become new!"*

That's what happens when we repent. We begin the process of a whole new way of living.

Today, it seems as though repentance is a foreign concept.

- We find ourselves blind to the error of our ways.
- We have talked ourselves into thinking that we have not really done anything wrong.
- We live complacently in the notion that there is fundamentally no reason to do anything different than what we have been doing.

The truth though is that there is a universal need to repent. Perhaps you are feeling that need. You sense a need to be totally transformed.

Frederick Buechner puts it well when he writes, *"To confess your sins to God is not to tell him anything he doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you and God. When you confess them though, they become the bridge between you and God."*

As we mentioned earlier, we have been talking about developing new habits, habits that draw us closer to God. Be assured of this then: When our hearts are right, we will find ourselves developing those new habits. Inner health leads to a whole new way of living. So then, let's measure our repentance by our reforms. Inner health leading to new life. Repentance leading to reform.

And Be Baptized

Those who listened to Peter that first Pentecost not only were challenged to make an about face and turn to the Lord, but were called to be baptized, the very thing that would mark them as Christian disciples. The waters of baptism pointed them to the wonderworking power of God to forgive them and set them on a new course.

Our baptismal liturgy summarizes things this way when it comes to baptism, *"Brothers and sisters in Christ: through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are initiated into Christ's holy church. We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit."*

Since the very beginning, baptism has been the very thing that forms our identity as Christians and certainly ties us to one another. Our own bishop, Bishop Fairley talks all the time about being *"water-washed and Spirit born."*

Baptism cements who we are and whose we are. All along, baptism has been a sign or seal of the fact that a person was Christian. It is sort of a *"Hello, my name is"* tag. *"Hello, I am Christian."*

I love the story told of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26ff., where the two met on the road leading out of Jerusalem on the way to Gaza. Philip offered a compelling witness to the good news about Jesus, whereupon the eunuch wanted to be baptized. He was ready to do it. There was a real sense of urgency.

"Look, here is some water," he said. *"Why shouldn't I be baptized?"* In other words, *"Let's get to it. I am ready to roll."*

I remember years ago while in college singing at a church near Bowling Green with a gospel group Cheryl and I were a part of. A young man gave his life to Christ and wanted to be baptized. I remember the pastor of the church calling out in the middle of a packed altar, *"Tom Grieb, get some water, we're going to have a baptism."*

Now that's urgency.

I try to live in the reality of my baptism day by day. I encourage you to do the same. It is a wonderful habit to develop.

You have heard me talking on other occasions about getting caught out in the rain and "*remembering*" my baptism.

I remember running in a half marathon in Naples, Florida a few years back when we came upon a pastor dressed in full vestments throwing water on everybody running by. I knew what he was doing, he was calling upon us to "*remember*" our baptisms. As I went by, I simply extended my arms and praised the Lord.

Just the other day while walking out our front door a single drop of melted snow fell on my head and I "*remembered*" my baptism.

"Remember your baptism and be blessed." It is the very thing that will keep you alive to your true identity in Christ. We are called to continually renew our baptism, refreshing not only the memory of our baptism, but taking it on for the day in which we live.

And when we do that, we can be well-assured that the Holy Spirit will fall upon us anew. Our lives will be renewed, and we will rejoice in the relationship that is ours in God through Jesus Christ.

No Time Like the Present

"Repent and be baptized, 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." Acts 2:38

When it comes to such things there is no time like the present.

How is God moving in your life, driving you toward the sort of change and transformation we have been talking about today?

Tom Harris, the author of that great book of quite a few years back, *I'm OK, You're OK* talks about three reasons why people change.

- First, people change when it is more **painful** to remain as they have been.
- Second, people change when at the point of **desperation**. Reaching rock bottom is a great motivator.
- Third, people change when they encounter what he calls, "**The Eureka Moment.**" People discover—sometimes much to their surprise—something much better, something they have been missing all along.

Of course, this is what Jesus came to offer. Jesus, and everything he offers, is our Eureka Moment.

Eureka!! I found him!! Alleluia!!