



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for April 24, 2022**  
**“Sacrament: Claimed by God”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Colossians 2:8-15**

### **Colossians 2:8-15**

*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.*

*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self, ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

### **Water Is Necessary for Life**

Water is necessary for life. My friend, Mark Hogg, has spent the better part of his adult life promoting and providing clean water to people worldwide. His WaterStep ministry has helped countless thousands around the world.

I read an article recently that rated various nations for their quality of life. Availability of clean drinking water was one of the criteria used. Quite frankly, clean drinking water is something we take for granted. Simply put, water is essential to life. We can't go a long time without water, in most cases just a few days.

Interestingly, water is front and center when it comes to the Christian faith. Water is the stuff of baptism, the very thing that awakens us to the new life that is ours in Christ.

### **One of Two Sacraments**

Baptism is one of the two sacraments of the church. We'll be talking about those two sacraments over the next couple of weeks. A sacrament is that which is set aside by the church as holy and sacred. It is the most “sacred” thing we do. In baptism, we recognize that we are:

- Claimed by God
- Initiated into his family
- And given a fresh start.

## **A Fresh Start**

Regarding that fresh start, baptism is a celebration of that.

All of us know the power of water to cleanse. You take a shower after a long, hot day working in the yard, and you simply feel refreshed. All the dirt is washed away, and you become clean.

The waters of baptism symbolize the cleansing that takes place when we offer our lives to Jesus. Baptism is symbolic of our passing from death to life. Because of what Jesus did on the cross our sins are forgiven. We become new creations in him. II Corinthians 5:17 has this to say about the new life that is ours in Christ, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”* (II Corinthians 5:17)

Romans 6:3 states that *“all of us who are baptized into Christ are baptized into his death.”* We are no longer slaves to sin because in Christ sin no longer has sway. Guilt no longer has the same hold upon our lives. If baptism means anything, it means that our old ways of doing are dead and buried. We die to sin, only to be raised to new life.

What a wonderful image for the Sunday after Easter. Our lives are forever different because of what Jesus has done.

Our scripture for today from Colossians 2:12 states that *“having been buried with him in baptism,”* we are raised with him through faith in the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead. We die with Christ, only to be raised with him.

Peter preached about such things clearly at Pentecost. *“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)

As we all know, the Holy Spirit is powerful—for this life and the next.

## **Baptism—A Matter of Identity**

Since the beginnings of Christianity, baptism has been understood as a sign or seal that the one baptized is Christian. Like circumcision for the children of Israel, baptism was a clear sign that the person baptized was claimed by God.

From Colossians 2:11 we read, *“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ.”* (Colossians 2:11)

Our identity as Christians rests in baptism. It is that marker which sets us apart as one of God's own, again claimed by God. It comes to us to live into that identity with God's help. In effect, we are called by name and recognized as a child of God.

Years ago, I baptized a young man by the name of Matthew Karshna. As I began to dip him into the baptismal, I said, *“Matthew Karshner, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”*

As he went into the water, I could hear him say with bubbles coming out of his mouth, *“It's Karshna, my name is Karshna.”*

Identity is an important thing. It is also quite powerful.

### **Remembering Who We Are**

I am forever forgetting things. I keep a detailed calendar and a substantial to-do list and, if given enough time, I am pretty good at getting things accomplished. I forget though much more than I remember.

Sometimes I even forget who I am. Now I have not gotten so bad as to forget my name, but I do forget those things that form the foundation of who I am.

It is easy for any of us to forget God's claim upon our lives and the work he is trying to do in us.

- I do that every time I sin.
- I do that every time I let the cares and concerns of this world get the best of me.
- I do that every time I get caught up in the world and its agenda.

We identify with so much these days—our alma maters, our work, our country, our heritage, our families, even our favorite teams. Our very identities are wrapped up in such things. I fear, though, that in the mix of all those things that “*identify*” us, we may very lose sight of the one distinct identifier of our faith, that being baptism, and because of that we may very well forget who we are and whose we are.

Spiritual amnesia is much too rampant. We are all too quick to forget the waters of our own baptism.

How about your baptism? How does it figure into your identity? When was the last time you considered yourself a baptized person? I have often thought of baptism as a *Hello, My Name Is* sticker. “*Hello, My Name Is and I Am a Christian.*”

The great reformer, Martin Luther, claimed that the most comforting thing a person could say to themselves was, “*I am baptized.*” He did just that almost every day. For Luther remembering his baptism was a wonderfully positive way to begin each day. In effect, he reminded himself that through baptism he was a new creation in Christ and needed to celebrate that.

It's interesting to note that when Christ was baptized God spoke saying, “*This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” Even Christ's identity was confirmed at baptism.

### **Baptism—Something the Church Just Does**

Baptism is something the church just does.

Many of you know Kelly McClendon. He was pastor here a few years back. He and I were at a meeting together during Holy Week. We were talking about one of our high steeple churches in the Covington area that had all but closed.

Kelly then mentioned some cathedrals he had seen in Europe. While visiting one of those he asked the person giving the tour if there was still a church there. Digging a bit deeper, Kelly asked if they still did baptisms. When the tour guide said, “*no,*” Kelly responded by saying, “*Well then, you ceased being a church and became a museum.*”

Baptism is just what the church does, and when we baptize, we come together to support the one being baptized.

I was baptized as an infant by Emil McAdams at Buechel Methodist Church. I felt overwhelming support from that church while I grew up. Interestingly, Mac and I served together for four years at St. Paul and to this day I consider him my mentor in the ministry.

Baptism, and the support that comes along with it, is just what the church does.

Many of you know of Anthony Campolo. He is an influential Christian author, speaker, and professor. Anthony, in doing some research on his denomination, decided to look up the church report for the year he was baptized.

*“There was my name,” he said, “and Dick White’s. Dick is now a missionary. Bert Newman’s name was also listed. He is a professor of theology at an African seminary.”*

That report read like this, *“It has not been a good year for our church. We have lost twenty-seven members. Three joined, and they were only children.”*

Undoubtedly, that church nurtured those three boys in the faith and the influence of just those three is untold. Baptism, and support that comes along with it, is just what the church does.

### **Baptism—A Means of Grace**

United Methodists baptize people of all ages. We lean heavily upon what God does and less upon what we do. We adhere to an understanding of God’s grace that seeks us out even before we accept him. In the case of an infant, we believe that God reaches out even before the baby knows his name.

God, in his infinite grace, is always at work wooing us to himself. He prevents us from going so far afield that we would never be at a place where we could not accept him.

God’s grace is in play before salvation, at the point of salvation, and even during that time after salvation. This understanding of grace forms the foundation of what why we baptize people of all ages.

Baptism is a means of grace, a vehicle of sorts that connects us with the free gift of God’s love.

### **Important Questions**

The questions we ask when a person professes their faith in Christ and prepares to be baptized, are questions we need to consider every time we hear them.

*“Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world and repent of your sin?”*

*“Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”*

*“Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?”*

I trust that as you respond to these questions you will also renew, yet again, the identity that is yours in your baptism.

***“Remember Your Baptism and Be Blessed”***

As United Methodists, rather than re-baptize, we consider it more appropriate to re-affirm what was done at an earlier time. In our way of thinking, to re-baptize would cast doubt on what God had done previously.

To re-affirm baptism though is to be reminded of who we are and what God is doing in our lives.

You are invited to do just that today.

If you have never been baptized, and feel led to do so, you are certainly invited to follow up on that leading. If you have been baptized, then you are more than welcome to renew that baptism.

*“Remember your baptism and be blessed”* is what’s spoken. Recognizing God’s claim upon your life is what happens. You remember yet again that you are child of God, and in that re-affirm your identities in him.