

“LIVING UNDER THE WATER.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Texts for the Sermon: Romans 6:1-5

Introduction.

On April 6, 1958, my now deceased younger brother, Fred, and I were baptized at Calvin United Presbyterian Church in Corvallis, OR. I was just over two, my brother was seven months old.

I don't remember it. I don't have any recollection of any part of it. No pictures were taken. More significantly, my parents never spoke of that event to me as I was growing up. No conversations, no reminders, no reflections on what it meant or why it was important. I had no idea the event even took place until I starting digging around in my past and found the churches name and contacted them for details which they had record of.

I feel some sadness about that and wonder what might have been different if I had known.

We just witnessed a baptism where a child has been marked with the sign of the covenant and is now a member of the visible covenant community of Christ.

Here is the question for all of us who have been baptized, whether as an infant or an adult. What have you done with your baptism? Or what are you doing with your baptism? Are you using your baptism? How are you using it? Do you ever think about it?

Is it like that old sports trophy that is gathering dust in a closet somewhere?

Is it like a keepsake or a souvenir on a shelf somewhere with a bunch of others?

Is it a distant memory gathering dust in the recesses of your mind?

Was it just one of those once-in-a-lifetime events, that we move on from? Like getting your tonsils or appendix removed; or like those childhood vaccine shots you got as a kid; or like getting your driver's license, once you have it you don't have to think about that anymore.

Why did Jesus ordain baptism? Why are we not just saved by grace through faith and that's the end of it? If we are saved by grace through faith, why do we need a ritual, a symbol of that?

Living under the water.

I want to wade into deep water with you this morning. Baptism is filled with an ocean of meaning and every baptism is a call to remember our own. This morning I want to call us to be a people who live under water.

I want to explore with you *two ways to use your baptism*, to make it more of a conscious part of your life: by remembering your baptism and by improving your baptism.

I am speaking to those who have been baptized after a profession of faith, or as an infant who has now come to an age to understand baptism or has made a profession of your own faith in Jesus. And to parents who have baptized their babies, these are the things to pass on.

Remember your baptism.

Remember your baptism. How can you remember something that you can't remember?

Do you remember the day of your birth? No, but that doesn't keep you from remembering it every year on your birthday. You remember the gift of life and you celebrate it with gratitude to God for all His grace and goodness.

We do the same with our baptism. We remember it by remembering with gratitude the significance of it, what it means and why it is important.

Obviously when our children are young we parents are the ones to remind them. You might chose to remember their baptism date each year, or you might just incorporate that conversation into their birthday or bring up along the way as you deal with life's challenges.

Paul gives us three ways to remember our baptism.

When asked shall we continue to sin so that grace may abound more, he is shocked.

What, don't you remember you are baptized? Don't you remember what that means?

Romans 6:3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

First, remember what you were before baptism.

Remembering your baptism means remembering that you needed to be baptized. You were dirty, corrupted by nature, having Adam's sin nature in you from conception, and

you were corrupted by your own personal sins. Remember what you once were, dead in your sins, alienated from Christ, a stranger to the promises of the covenant, without hope and without God (Ephesians 2:11-12). Acknowledge your past and your great need for baptism.

It is a bit like recalling some near death experience and reflecting on what could have happened.

Second, remember you were baptized.

Just as water is absolutely essential to our physical life, it is absolutely essential to our spiritual life. Water cleanses, washes, purifies, refreshes, revives.

Remember you were buried with Christ, washed in the blood of Christ, cleansed by the regenerative and purifying work of the Holy Spirit, of which your baptism is a sign and seal.

Remember your baptism by remembering the cleansing water by which all your sins are forgiven. ***Remembering*** your baptism gives you the confident assurance your sins are forgiven.

Remember that you have died to sin, and that you die to it now, and you die to it again and again.

You are no longer a slave to sin and Satan, but a slave to Christ and His righteousness.

Since you have died to sin, why would you ever think about living in sin, as Paul asks?

Third, remember you were baptized into Christ.

Baptism is a putting on of Christ and when you put on Christ you put on His death which destroyed sin. Baptism is a putting on of a new man and putting off of the old man.

Baptism means we are new creatures, having died to ourselves. If we share His death, then we share His resurrection to new life. Being united with Christ means we share in all the blessings of His kingdom as heirs of the King.

Baptism means we are not your own. We have a seal on us, a signature. This says we are no longer our own, we have given ourselves to another, we belong to Jesus and His people.

Remember your baptism by remembering your vows to walk a new path, to go a different direction, to walk in newness of life.

How often should we remember our baptism? As often as we are tempted to sin.

Martin Luther is famously remembered for his way of dealing with temptations to sin every time they hit him. He would look at the temptation in the face and say, “I am baptized.”

When Satan comes creeping about, when we are tempted to willfully sin and walk contrary to the commands of God, in effect to deny our baptism and sin against God’s grace, remember your baptism, remember your identity, remember the triune name that was spoken over you.

“I have been baptized into Jesus Christ. I died to sin in Him. I have been raised to life in Jesus Christ, I don’t have to give in to temptation. I belong to God the Father, Son and Spirit.”

Remember your baptism any time you face anything stressful, scary, painful or difficult.

Remember your baptism at work, at school, at home, at church, when you drive, go grocery shopping, make decisions, pray, love one another.

Make your baptism real, practical, tangible, something others can see. Remember your baptism.

Improve your baptism.

There was a time long ago when Christians talked about improving their baptism. They made this means of grace, not just a one-time event, but a daily event, a daily walking in newness of life.

It is not that there is anything wrong with our baptism, but there is much fruit we can draw from living under the water.

How would you go about improving your baptism, or build on it? Let me offer a dozen ways.

We improve our baptism when we strive to know God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the three names we were baptized in.

We improve our baptism when we renounce Satan and his lies, when we renounce the sins of the world and our own sins, when we live as someone who is dead to selfishness, ambition, lust, greed, gossip and envy.

We improve our baptism when after we have confessed our sins and repented, we actually joyfully believe the assurance of our pardon and trust the promises of God for our forgiveness.

We improve our baptism when we love God by living thankful, grateful and godly lives before Him and with each other.

We improve our baptism when we think about our covenant vows and strive to faithfully keep them.

We improve our baptism when we pray for the baptized children in our flock.

We improve our baptism when we make our baptism our anchor in the storms of life, our firm foundation when our world is shaking. If God is for me who or what can be against me.

We improve our baptism when we pray Our Father, Abba Father, acknowledging our adoption and right to be called children of God (I John 3:1).

We improve our baptism by living by faith in humble, prayerful dependence on Jesus.

We improve our baptism when we strengthen our ties with the body of Christ, the fellowship of believers, when we don't just go to church and that's it, but we seek ways to build relationships with the visible body of Christ.

We improve our baptism when we work to preserve unity in the body, when we strive to be peacemakers, when we don't quarrel or bear grudges or have a critical spirit.

We improve our baptism when we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, when we treat each other like family.

We improve our baptism when we spur one another on to love and good works.

We improve our baptism when we tell our children and keep telling them they are baptized and they belong to Jesus. Like every day when they walk out the door, "Remember your baptism, remember you belong to Jesus, remember He is in you and you are in Him."

We improve our baptism when we live under the influence of it each day, living under the influence of water.

What have we done with our most blessed benefit and privilege called baptism? What will you do with your baptism today and this week? How can you and your family remember and improve your baptisms?

Make this a lifelong habit, and let every baptism be a reminder to remember and improve your baptism and those of your covenant children. Live under the waters of your baptism.

Every time we wash up, take a bath or shower, clean something with water, it is an occasion to remember being under the water, living under the influence of water. When you give your child a bath, talk about the water of baptism.

Conclusion and application.

Baptism is called a means of receiving God's grace. There is grace in these waters for Jessica and there is grace in these waters for all of us this morning as we remember, recall to mind, improve and make more real the waters of our own baptism.

Psalm 103:17-18 The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,
18 to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

May the glorious reality of what your baptism means so grip your heart and mind, that you will stir up every remembrance of it and make every effort to improve your memory and practice.

Next week we will come to the Lord's Table to also remember and improve our baptism.

What will we commemorate and celebrate? The death and resurrection of Christ (in which we are joined in baptism). The cleansing power of Christ's blood and his forgiveness (which was attested in our baptism). The "communion" of God's people (whom we joined in our baptism). Gathering around the Lord's Table is a remembering, an improving of our baptism.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank you for our baptism that reminds us of your promise never to destroy us in our sin as with the flood. You have saved us as you saved believing Noah and his family and you have spared us as you spared the Israelites who walked safely through the sea. We pray that Christ, who went down into the Jordan and came up to receive the Spirit, who sank deep into death and was raised up Lord of life, will always keep us and our little ones in the grip of His hand. We pray, Holy Father, that your Spirit will separate us from sin and openly mark us with a faith that can stand the light of day and endure the dark of night (from CRC Liturgy).

Father, in every circumstance and situation, in every unsettling moment, help us to remember your faithfulness to us and help us to grab hold of our baptism, that our lives are built on the solid rock foundation of Christ. Amen.