

D.J. Reed
January 8, 2012

Baptism of The Lord Sunday

Chilson Hills Church
Howell, MI

“A New Way of Living”

Acts 19:1-7

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193123791>

The other day, Heather, Lincoln and I were walking through Meijer and we came upon an endcap filled with pillow pets.

Do you know what pillow pets are? You'd know 'em if you saw 'em. They look like stuffed animals with a Velcro band around the middle. And when you undo the band, the animal unfolds and flattens to make a nice, comfy pillow.

Lincoln notices these pillow pets which happen to be wearing Detroit sports paraphernalia. So, there's a Detroit lion, a tiger, and a purple octopus wearing a Red Wings sweater.

“What's dat, Daddy?” asked Lincoln pointing at the ferocious purple pillow pet.

“That's an octopus,” I replied.

And then I think it was Heather who asked, “What's an octopus got to do with The Red Wings?”

Now, I know about the bizarre and famed tradition of christening the NHL playoffs by chucking this fleshy marine animal flopping down on to the ice, but I couldn't explain *why* Detroit fans do this.

I didn't know about Peter Cusimano, a local fish market owner who first threw the octopus onto the ice in 1952.

I didn't know that he did this because the octopus' eight legs represented the eight wins that were necessary for winning the Stanley Cup at the time.

I didn't know any of this until recently. Can you imagine that? I live near Detroit, the city many call, “Hockeytown,” and I didn't know the history behind one of the more unique traditions in all of sports.

But I can't be too hard on myself because many of you didn't know that either. You, who have lived here for years – some of you all your lives – rooting

for The Red Wings didn't know the story about the octopus.

You oughtta be ashamed of yourselves!

But I can't be too hard on you either because really this kind of thing happens all of the time: we are ignorant of the roots and details behind the things we hold dear. We don't know the history behind holidays, family names, neighborhoods, personal traditions and the companies we work for.

The same can be said for our faith. Many of you in this room would consider yourself to be a Christian. And yet there are parts of our faith that are yet a mystery; parts that we still don't understand.

Like miracles, prayer, the will of God, angels, demons, the Devil, why God lets bad things happen, the virgin birth, heaven, hell... This list goes on and on.

These are things that if your kid or a friend were to ask you about them you would blanch and struggle to find an answer.

This is probably how the Ephesian believers felt when Paul asked them about two other mysterious components to our faith: The Holy Spirit & baptism.

In the text that we just read, the Apostle Paul, who after converting to Christianity, now finds himself traveling all over the Roman Empire as a missionary. And while he is journeying he comes upon a group of “believers” in a city in modern-day Turkey called Ephesus.

The writer of this story calls them “believers” to indicate that they weren't disciples yet, they were like curious students searching for a master teacher, much like the magi whom David talked about last Sunday. They saw a star in the east and believed it would lead them to the King of the Jews.

But the Magi were a little confused right? Instead of searching for Jesus in a manger among common folks, they went to the palace where the current King of the Jews resided.

You see, they were searching, but they needed a bit of a course correction. They, like the Ephesian Christians that Paul stumbled upon are headed in the right direction, but they needed a bit of guidance.

We don't know how "off" they were, but Paul knew. It could have been that he overheard them talking about and debating about Jesus in the public forum. It could have been a chance meeting or it could have been in the marketplace. We're not sure. But Paul hears enough to know that they might not know about the Holy Spirit.

He asks, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?"

Do you know about the Holy Spirit?

And the Ephesian believers respond like many of us do: "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

I mean sure, we hear about it every week and we mutter its name as we cross ourselves or when we receive or give a blessing. But we don't really know about the Holy Spirit.

If you don't know about the Holy Spirit, don't feel bad; there are plenty of Christians, believers like the Ephesians, who don't know a thing about the Holy Spirit.

It's the mysterious third member of The Trinity who doesn't have a face like Jesus and is never personified like God the Father.

The Holy Spirit is literally the presence of God. It has been with us since the beginning of time, but we don't hear much about it in The Bible until Jesus comes along.

Jesus talks a lot about the Spirit, especially in the Gospel of John and then when Jesus rises from the dead, he appears to his disciples and he says, "Receive the Holy Spirit," and he breathes on them.

Later on The Holy Spirit has its big coming-out party. Jesus has ascended into heaven and the disciples are left wondering as to what is next. So, while they are gathered together in a room they hear the sound of a rushing wind, tongues of fire sweep into the room and the disciples are overcome by and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

And this isn't a superpower like something they received from the bite of a radioactive spider or because they were standing too close to gamma rays. No, they receive powers to minister. They speak in other languages and they run out to the streets telling other people from around them about Jesus.

Now, this Holy Spirit is not to be confused with the popular, secular concept of "spirit." It is not something that exists in you to make you feel confident. It is not there to make you feel happy or strong.

The Holy Spirit, the presence of God that lives inside of each "believer," is there to provide strength, guidance and power so that you can do what you were called to do. It is inside of you to help you do ministry – to love, to encourage, to give, and to help.

And this is probably why the Holy Spirit remains a mystery – it's inside and void of any shape or form. It's power and vitality. It is the power source behind Christian action.

When you look at a car, someone ignorant of machines could deduce that the car is only what we can see on the outside. But we who know about machines and who know about cars, know that there are many unseen things that we can't see on the outside that make it run. Things like fuel, electricity, oil, fluids, computers, information.

The Holy Spirit is like those unseen things that make a car go. These things are difficult to visualize, but they are absolutely essential.

Pastor Francis Chan wrote a children's book recently called "The Little Red Tractor." (I gave you a break from football illustrations, but I couldn't manage to give you a break from

children's books – sorry.). The story tells about a village that had a little red tractor. And every spring the villagers would take the tractor out to the fields every year to help plant their crops. And then every fall, they would bring the tractor back out to harvest the crops.

The work was hard, but with the help of the little red tractor, the people of the village were always able to plant their fields, attend to their crops and harvest each fall.

Well, one evening one of the villagers was looking through their garage when they came across the owner's manual for the little red tractor. The villager began reading and discovered much to his surprise that the little red tractor could do much more.

It had an engine; and that engine could be started. And that engine could turn the wheels which would make it possible for them to pull heavy loads and push other things out of the way. They could plow the fields, plant the crops, and harvest the fruits of their labor with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

The point of the story is to present a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. We can have a relationship with Jesus and we can follow Jesus as a believer just like a tractor can be useful without a running engine.

But do you see what is possible when you have a tractor with the ignition turned on. What do you think is possible if a believer is driven by the Holy Spirit? According to The Bible and what we know about church history – a life under the direction, influence and power of the Holy Spirit is life and world changing force.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that life isn't only about being saved and being a "believer," it's about living life to the fullest as a servant and as a minister to others.

Christians who don't know about the Holy Spirit, and believe that the Christian life is all about living a righteous life and getting to heaven, need to know there is something more – a whole lot more. That's what Paul wanted these Ephesian believers to know. He wanted to give them a better understanding

about this life that they were just beginning to understand.

Which is why he continued to ask probing questions...

"Into what then were you baptized?"

"John's baptism," they said; which means that they had been studying the words of John the Baptist, the wilderness prophet who came to tell other people that Jesus was coming.

He told people that they should repent, that they should leave their old way of living and be baptized. Baptism is the act of being immersed in water or having water poured over you (the method is not that important). When John baptized it was like being bathed, like your sins were being washed away.

It was like taking a shower before a guest of honor was to arrive. This is what John's baptism meant. It was necessary and important, but there was more.

John, as I said in another sermon, was the "trailer" for the featured presentation. John told you about what was "coming soon."

John was the shortcut icon on your desktop and that shortcut pointed to the main file with all the information you need.

John's baptism was important – it was a significant part of salvation. But the baptism Paul describes – the baptism into Jesus – was something different. It wasn't superior to John's, it just completed John's baptism.

In Baptist churches, and many other Christianity, the baptism moment is a big deal. A very big deal. We get excited about it. Why?

Because it's necessary and because if you do it you are somehow saved and have a ticket into heaven?

No, that's not what Baptists believe and I don't believe that's a fair interpretation of the way baptism is presented in Scripture.

We believe that baptism in Christ rounds out the Christian experience by powerfully representing what happens in the Christian life like no other experience can.

“We are buried with Christ in baptism (lowered back into the water as if we are being buried, dying to our old life) and we are raised to walk in the newness of life (brought back up out of the water clean, resurrected to live a life of service, following after Christ as ministers for Christ).”

That is so much more than living a clean, pure life. It’s so much more than joining a religion. It’s about receiving a new identity and committing yourself to a community. It’s a testimony, a story about what Christ is doing in your life. It’s a ceremony where you declare your commitment to living a life of action.

It’s comparable to sitting on bench and suddenly deciding to run out to the playing field.

It’s like getting married after dating for a while.

It’s a public confession of your commitment and a demonstration of your love. It’s your opportunity to state publicly and show to everyone that you are beginning a new life.

Over the next three weeks we have two “new life” classes.

The first is a class being taught by Scott Runyon which goes beyond New Years resolutions and talks about living a life of wellness and wholeness – the way we were meant to live.

And the second class is a baptism class taught April Ping.

If you want to know how you can make that truly exciting decision to be baptized, I encourage you to sign up for this class at that Information Center. Last year we had two people baptized, Sarah Ryan & Jack Irwin. I want more of you to experience what they did. Baptism is a powerful experience, and we see, through Paul’s example, that it’s important for all of you to experience it. And that in those waters of baptism you can experience something extraordinary.

Dave was finishing a week of summer camp during his final year of high school when he decided to be baptized. I’m not sure what compelled him to make this decision.

Maybe it was the songs, the Bible studies, the conversations: maybe it was urgency of the moment. Whatever the reason, he asked Darren to if he could be baptized and agreed to baptize Dave in front of peers in the camp swimming pool.

Slowly with his good friend there to help him, Dave stepped down into the pool and made his way to Darren who stood in the center. Darren fought tears to say the words he should say.

You see, Dave had Cerebral Palsy and it had been getting increasingly difficult for him to walk. The tightening and twisting of his muscles made his movements increasingly dramatic and crooked. A wheel chair became more and more necessary.

But the one place Dave felt at home was the water, the safety of the pool. Because there he didn’t have to worry about gravity as much. It was easier for him to walk. He didn’t have to strain as much to move. He could float. He could glide. The water helped him move and eased the strain.

Darren thought about this as he looked at Dave’s crooked body, bent to the side. Here in the waters of Christ’s baptism, Dave felt more alive than he did on solid ground.

The Christian life begins with a belief in Jesus and is distinguished by right living. But it’s so much more than belief and being pure. Paul wanted the believers of Ephesus to know that. He wanted them to know that Christianity is a new life, a new way of living in the power of the Spirit, a life that breaks free from the gravity of the world’s influences. It’s a life that is propelled by The Holy Spirit so that we can live to serve God and others. Baptism reminds us of this life – the life we are called to live.

Can you think of a reason why you wouldn’t want to experience that?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS
For Sunday, January 8, 2012's Sermon

Scripture: Acts 19:1-7 <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193123791>

Sermon Series: None

Sermon Title: “A New Way of Living”

Question: Why should I be baptized?

Synopsis: Baptism is a physical sign of a spiritual reality (i.e. – a sacrament). The action of being submersed is a public affirmation that Christ has given us new life and that the Holy Spirit is working in us. Life is not the same after baptism.

Featured Scripture: “Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”– Acts 19:4,5

Opening Icebreaker: Share about a life-changing moment you experienced? Do you celebrate or commemorate that moment? If so, how?

Additional Question: What does baptism mean to you?

Scripture Questions

What is the scripture saying?

- Read Acts 19:1-7. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193123791> What stands out to you about this passage? What questions does it raise? What does it tell you about the baptism? What does it tell you about God?
- Read Matthew 3:13-17. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193123873> What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this story? What does it tell you about Jesus? What does it tell you about God?
- Read Romans 6:1-4. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=193123902> How does this passage compliment what was read in the previous passages?

How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the “Good News” in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages affect me? (i.e. - How are these passages speaking to me?)

God's word

- What is God's invitation to you?

A prayer

God, I thank you for saving me for giving me a new life. Thank you for baptism which reminds us that we have died to our old way of life and are free to live a new life in you. Amen