

Remembering Our Baptism

Scripture: Psalm 78:1-4

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Morning Service

People of God: We remember the significant moments in our lives. Like marriage. Tony, will I put you on the spot to tell me the date of your marriage? If you don't get it right, you'll be in trouble with Jessica. Your wedding day was an important step in your relationship. That's why each year; you celebrate your wedding anniversary. Those are dates you should not forget.

In the same way, it is important to remember the spiritual milestones in our lives as well. In the opening of Psalm 78, the Psalmist calls upon God's people to tell the next generation what God has done for them in the past. That's true, not just on a communal level; it is also true at a personal level. We need to remember the spiritual milestones in our walk with God—like profession of faith.

But that is where we run into a problem with baptism. Baptism is an important event in our spiritual development. In baptism, God lays his claim upon us. In baptism, we are incorporated into the covenant community. In baptism, God signs and seals his promises to us—the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. As a result, baptism is a very important event in our lives.

That leads into a problem. The problem is that we do not remember our own baptism—at least, not if we were baptized as an infant, as Nathan was this morning. But why is that a problem? Well, because in today's religious climate the focus is often upon our personal experience and feelings.

Today, believers want to be able express their faith more freely and openly in worship than has happened in the past. There is a desire for personal testimonies, more emotional songs, and more interactive worship. There is something healthy about this trend. We do need to be more open and expressive about our faith.

But the problem arises when that sentiment gets applied to baptism. Because while the parents and the extended family might have something to say today, while Tony and Jessica might get emotional watching their firstborn be baptized, Nathan himself can't say a word. He doesn't feel anything, except perhaps the shock of water on his head, to which he might scream. But he really cannot respond. He won't remember this day.

And so, if people want to stress that they have made the choice in believing in God, if they want to celebrate what they have done and what they can remember, then believers will be drawn towards adult baptism, rather than infant baptism.

This problem underscores the need for us to remember our baptism and the reason why we baptize our covenant children. We need to remember that however much we want to focus of attention to be on the person being baptized, the real focus in baptism is not on the one baptized but on God. Baptism is primarily an act of God, an act in which God claims us as his children. Today, God extended his covenant promise to Nathan. That's an important milestone in his life.

But some may ask then, if this act of God is so important, doesn't that make this problem—of not being able to remember our baptism—doesn't that intensify the problem? Shouldn't we wait until we can remember that we were baptized? Wouldn't that be more meaningful?

Not necessarily.

There are often important milestones in our lives that we often cannot fully remember. Take for example, graduations. These are important markers in our learning process. I've gone through four graduation ceremonies: from elementary school, high school, university and then seminary. Yet, to be honest, I can't remember too many details from any of them. Does that invalidate my education? Does it make all my many years of schooling worthless? No. Every day I depend upon what I have learnt in school.

Or take my ordination as a Minister, as another example. It was a major milestone in my life. I do remember the text and who preached, but not too much else. But I do have a certificate of ordination in my wallet to prove that I was ordained.

And so, there are many events in our events, when we were there but where we remember only small parts of the events. But even when they don't fully stay in our memory, it does not invalidate their importance, worth or influence in our lives.

And there is one milestone, which we all celebrate every year, and which not one person here actually remembers. And that's their birthdays.

We all are born. But none of us have an active memory of it. But that does not stop us from celebrating it, or to be thankful for it. Without our birth, we would not be here. Yet we can't remember the actual day.

And so it is with the baptism of covenant children. Just as Nathan does not remember the day of his birth, at least, not first hand, so too he will not remember what took place here this morning, at least not first hand. But that does not make his baptism meaningless or unimportant. Because in his baptism, God has marked him as a covenant child, with all the blessings that with that. And his baptism, his inclusion into the covenant community needs to shape his life from now on.

And so, just as the day of his birth will be remembered and celebrated, so too his baptism needs to be remembered and it needs to shape his life. In a different way than our birthdays, but still our baptism needs to be remembered. That's why the form for baptism says: "We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God's own children."

But how is this done? How we remember something for which we have no active memory? How can families and a church community keep alive these acts of baptism?

Now the concern isn't remembering when our baptism occurred, but that it was done. I don't know the precise date of my baptism, but I do know it was done. It's the act of baptism that we want to remember. How do we do that?

One way is through the baptismal certificate, like the one I gave to Tony and Jessica. It may only be a piece of paper, but then so is my birth certificate and my ordination certificate. But they are little reminders of who I am and what I do. What I like about these new baptismal certificates is that they are easily framed. It can be hung on the wall, like Nathan's future graduation diplomas.

A second way to remember this day is through pictures, or even videotaping the baptism, like we would a marriage ceremony. Now I know that there is often a reluctance to take pictures during a worship service, but pictures are a great way to keep memories alive. In doing a scrapbook for Nathan, it would be wonderful to have a page devoted to his baptism.

Third, we remember our baptism by seeing baptism on a regular basis. Every time we witness a baptism, we should be reminded of our own baptism. At every baptism, parents have an opportunity to tell their growing children that they too were once baptized. Perhaps a simple whisper, saying: That was you four years ago. That happened to you fifteen years ago. Given

that we're witnessing baptism on a regular basis, we have plenty of opportunity to remind our children that they too were baptized.

But this idea of remembering our baptism is more than just acknowledging that our baptism happened. It's also a call to live out our baptism. It is to respond positively to our baptism. After all, why do we celebrate our birthdays? Because we're glad to be alive. We're thankful for the years that the Lord has given us.

And so the best way to remember our baptism is when we live it out. When we let our baptism shape our lives. But how do we do that?

Well, by accepting the promises of God extended in baptism as our own. In baptism God lays claim to us. He marks us with the sign and seal of the covenant: He says, "I am your God and you will be my people." And when we say yes to that, our baptism is affirmed. As a result, our baptism calls us to faith. To believe in this Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a formal way this happens when we make public profession of faith. That's why in profession of faith form the third question is as follows: "Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to you in your baptism and do you affirm your union with Christ and his church which your baptism signifies?" Our baptism is best remembered when we make public profession of faith.

But it does not stop there, with that one time event. Our baptism gives us our identity as God's covenant people. That shapes who we are every day that we live. And so, our baptism calls us to live out the Christian faith. To put to death the sinful nature and put on the new nature in Jesus Christ. That's a daily task. It's a never-ending process.

And so as you can hear, baptism is a call to faith and discipleship. It simply isn't a one-time event in our lives that can be forgotten once today is over. Yes, baptism needs only to be done once in our life, but the effects of our baptism are long lasting.

And so, as we witnessed baptism again this morning, we are reminded of our own baptism and the claim of God upon our lives. It's a call to those who have not fully embraced their baptism to do so. Because, yes, it is possible to reject our baptism. Just as children can become rebellious and reject their families; so too, covenant children can reject the claims of God upon their lives. But that's not what we want to see happen.

Instead, we want to encourage our covenant children and youth to embrace what their baptism signifies: faith in our Triune God: believing in the Father as the Creator, looking to Jesus as our Savior and Lord, relying on the Spirit for direction and guidance.

Maybe there are some here this morning who have forgotten their baptism. Maybe there are some who want to remove God's claim upon their lives. Maybe there are some who are living contrary to their baptismal identity. Then I urge you to remember what God has done for you in Jesus Christ.

Remember you baptism. Accept the claims of God upon your life. Live in accordance to your baptismal identity. Live as those who have been marked in the name of Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.