

BAPTISM – MEMORIES AND MYSTERY

Today we will baptize Anderson Taylor King and accept him into this community of faith called Centennial. Chances are we will recall our children, grandchildren or even our own Baptism. This is good, because we should **never** forget any Baptism for reasons that as disciples we have memories **and** we appreciate the mystery of the sacrament of Baptism.

Baptism is understood in the Methodist tradition as one of the two sacraments of the church, the other being the Lord's Supper. We as Methodists also agree Baptism is the means by which people are brought into the fellowship of the church.

Baptism being a sacrament by virtue of three things – Christ commanded it, it is carried out by a visible means, and the water, and most importantly, God is doing something, is at work in the sacrament.

Spiritual renewal is received through Baptism as an infant and then later in life in commitment to Christ, thus completing the two part activity of God's grace and our response.

Baptism certainly has its roots in the Bible in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and His atoning work which God gives us His grace to bring us back into relationship with Him.

From our Baptism where there is laying on of hands, a symbol of anointing by the Holy Spirit, the work continues when we can confirm this, and stand up for ourselves by confirming our Baptismal vows.

Confirmation is that time you simply answer for yourself those questions which your parents answered for you as a baby, just like April and Dana will do for Anderson today.

Baptism as an infant does bring the child into a "limited" membership of the church. By the service of Baptism being held in front of the congregation today there is a statement of ownership in the child's spiritual growth, and to renew our vows as a member of the body to use our gifts and resources to the nurture the child.

Confirmation today is a separate part of a believer's journey. Today, after teaching and nurturing youth or in some cases adults, confirmation is a public affirmation of their

Baptismal covenant, commitment to Christ as Lord, and acceptance of membership in His body the church. In this service the Holy Spirit strengthens the individual for discipleship to further holiness in the land.

As Wesley explained, Baptism is only the first step in a believer's journey in the way of salvation as God's grace is given and the individual is not left to walk alone on this faith journey.

Not being able to confess for one's self the next step of a believer is to confirm their Baptismal vows after teaching and nurturing which is Confirmation. At this same time the individual is accepted into the body as a "full" member to carry out the faith journey with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a clear and direct relationship between Baptism, Confirmation and membership --steps on a path, a lifelong journey of faith.

People do ask at times *why baptize?* I believe in talking to parents of an infant considering Baptism, I will draw on my past experience as a member of the Lutheran Church talking to parents from an Assembly of God background. My friends asked me what I thought were the benefits of having their daughters baptized. I discussed with them the benefits of God's grace, forgiveness and action of the Holy Spirit. Also have the entire church membership helping you as parents in the growth spiritually of your children is a reassuring thought. Along that line of thought Wesley asked *"why would we not take opportunity to partake in the Lord's Supper and receive the benefits"?*

Likewise in Baptism should we not take the opportunity to partake in the benefits for our children? I finally said to my friends in ending our discussion *"would you rather have your children fight the devil and all his ways with a butter knife or a sword?"*

I believe that in discussing Baptism with parents of an infant the benefits found within this Sacrament are first steps for one's life long journey in way of salvation.

One of the first things we likely recall from our memories is, whether a boy or girl, that Christening outfit. Sometimes the outfit had quite a history, being handed down from generation to generation. Even boys wore a baptismal dress **that** day! Other memories may include who was there such as a great grandmother or great aunt, where the service was held at a relative's church, and being "good" Methodists or for that matter any denomination, we probably have a memory of a meal with some special occasion dessert cooked by mom or grandma that everyone looks forward to. The wise cook always makes

more than one in order for everyone that desires to partake may have some. These are some of the memories we can recall today as we witness the Baptism of Anderson Taylor. For April, Dana, and Laney along with the rest of the family and friends here today, memories begin today that will be recalled in the coming years as Anderson grows physically and spiritually. This is an important part of what we as members of a faith community witness and experience – together! It is a special gathering of their family and friends that may not occur in this exact form again, cherish it, enjoy it and thank God for it!

Memories are good; they are part of what we carry with us. *However, today my desire is for us to remember as we have gathered in His name for worship in this building with the community of faith called Centennial and for member and visitor alike, that God is here and He is at work!*

*The other part of this Baptism is what God is doing – for and in Anderson as well as his parents and sister. Not to leave out all who are witnessing this Baptism either, God is doing something with you too! **No one** will leave this service today the same as they came in that door less than an hour ago.*

Remember, in defining a Sacrament that the third part is *God is working in the sacrament*. How? That is the mystery for us. I talked earlier about the “benefits” of Baptism and I believe this is why parents such as April and Dana bring their child and present them to God.

As scripture says in Luke 11:11 “what father among you, if his son asks for bread, would give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead of the fish?” Or in Matthew 7:11 “if you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!

We know God, and so do April and Dana, is here to give Anderson his best not just that which is good! The words come from the mouth of Jesus Himself and that is good enough for me!

In this mystery of Baptism God is helping to set Anderson’s path, but with free will just as all of us, he will stumble. But God has promised to be with him as well as the Holy Spirit.

In today’s service of Baptism the congregation will be asked to assist April and Dana in loving, caring, teaching and being that Christ-like example for Anderson as he grows up.

Why us? Remember we as disciples are His feet, His hands and His voice. God desires us to be His representative here on earth, especially in the lives of the young.

In Titus is the majority of a chapter that encourages the old men to teach the younger ones by example Verse 2:7 “in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds...” and the same applies for mature ladies to teach the young women.

The realization is that if our young do not see Christ-like examples in us then where in the world are they going to see it? Children are a gift from God, and a responsibility, but again God does not leave us alone. As parents He will provide, if we chose, family and a community of faith as His earthly helpers. God loves and His desire is for every child to grow up and walk with Him. That is our duty in this community of faith to be that example in word and deed.

If we want this church to be here 10, 25, 50 and even 100 years from now we need to embrace the young for they are the future. I do know that in groups or classes I have been in, when the subject comes up, it never fails that someone mentions an older person who was that example they remember, and how they were influenced by an older person, at some time in their life. It is a mystery, but we have that power to influence the young and I might add negatively as well as positively.

Today we have the privilege to witness again the mystery of Baptism and remember the promises of Baptism by God himself. When April and Dana bring Anderson to be baptized they are acting on the faith that God has given them. They are also relying on each and every one of us here, to stand with them as Anderson grows and matures.

There are verses that have extra meaning for all of us as April and Dana bring Anderson to be baptized today. The verses are found in Romans 8:38-39 “for I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In the mystery of Baptism, God comes and is present because of his love for each one of us. Anderson too will never be separated from the love of God. Amen.