

“...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”

⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I'll just say what everyone is thinking, “Uh, pastor, you said that already.” I know that. I meant to say those words twice and now I'll say them again: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We know those words, don't we; we hear them in church again and again. The pastor stands at the front of the altar after the opening hymn and says: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We confess our sins and then, as a called servant Christ and by His authority, the pastor forgives our sins in the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This morning the pastor scooped up water in a sea shell and poured it over the head of two children and said, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

I want you... actually, God wants you to think BAPTISM every time you hear those words. After all, Jesus first used those words in reference to Baptism when he said, “**Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**” We even call that sentence the baptismal formula. And so when we begin the service with those words we remember that we come to worship God as his baptized children. When we confess our sins, we want to kill the sinful nature that sticks to us just like our sinful nature was drowned in the waters of baptism. When the pastor forgives our sins he does the same thing Jesus did when we were baptized, and that is why he says, “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Martin Luther suggested that we begin our morning prayers and our evening prayers by remembering our baptism and by saying: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus often spoke about his relationship with his heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. Do you remember that late night conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus, the conversation that ended with Jesus' famous words, **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...**? You know how the passage ends. Jesus spoke clearly that night about the work he did together with the Father and the Spirit. In the long conversation he had with his disciples the night before he died Jesus spoke again about the same relationship. But there was only one time during Jesus' life on earth when the Father and the Spirit were both present with Jesus to be actually seen and heard, and that was at his baptism. At Jesus baptism we hear the Father and we see the Spirit and we watch the Son of God standing in the Jordan River as human being named Jesus. You heard it in the Gospel: **When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** We sang about this in the Hymn of the Day: “The Father's Word, the Spirit's flight anointed Christ in glorious sight.” There, at Jesus' baptism, when he begins his work as Savior, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

There is more to their relationship and their relationship to Baptism, as the apostle Paul will help us understand in our lesson this morning. The words of the lesson come from a letter Paul wrote to a young pastor named Titus who was doing ministry on the island of Crete (that's just south of Greece). The work wasn't easy; there were troublemakers on the island, and Paul had some harsh words for them. He called them **detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.** Not very good people, huh? But Paul had something more to say, and he dropped it like a GBU-43 – Air Force calls it a MOAB –the mother of all bombs, in vs3 he said, “**At**

one time we, too, were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”

We too? Who’s the *we* here? When Paul wrote “we”, who was he talking about? Was he talking about himself, was he talking about Titus? You bet he was, and he was talking about us, too, everyone of us sitting in this church today. I know that’s hard to take; for Christian people who take their religion seriously this is even hard to fathom. But Paul is describing what we were like when we came into the world. Some people hear this and just shake their heads. The idea that a baby, an innocent little baby is born foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved is just, well, it makes absolutely no sense to them. It makes no sense to me, either. I can’t explain this to you, I can only tell you what God says: **We, too** God said through Paul. God said it before the Flood: **Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart is only evil all the time.** God said it through David: **Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.** Jesus said it: **Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, theft,** and he listed more. The truth is, God’s truth is, that the human creature—these human creatures—are dead without God, dead as far as a relationship with God is concerned and destined for hell. I don’t like to say that to you, and I especially don’t like to hear it myself, but that’s what God says.

This is also what God says, and he said it through Paul in the Second Lesson, **“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.”** The Greek word for *love* in this verse is where our English word *philanthropy* is derived: love for humankind. You’ve seen love for humankind demonstrated these past few days with millions of dollars donated to help the cause in Haiti. In the same way, God looked down on the world he created and he wasn’t about to let it die because of the earthquake Adam and Eve and the devil brought when they sinned. God came up with a plan to restore the world that Adam and Eve and the devil had ruined. And he wasn’t going to depend on the philanthropy of the human race. Their good works, their efforts, their intentions, however noble they might be, are still infected with sin and not enough. Paul says, **“God saved us not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”** Do you think you understand the concept of mercy? Sure you do, if you can imagine yourself standing over the bed of your mother who is suffering from Alzheimer’s, or your wife who just suffered a miscarriage, or sitting on the couch watching destitute people suffer in Haiti, you understand a little bit about the compassion and mercy that filled the heart of your Heavenly Father. But your Father is different, because he can do something with his mercy and his compassion. He cured the disease, he took away the hurt and suffering, he healed the wounds. This Father actually saved us.

How did he do it? **God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.** Well, you don’t have to think too hard to know what Paul is talking about. This is Holy Baptism. Martin Luther called baptism simple water, but water used by Christ’s command and connected with God’s Word – in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And what does God’s Word do to this simple water? In the water of baptism the Holy Spirit works through the Word to give us a new life.

It’s like this: a man in Haiti is crushed by the weight of a building. They pull his body from the rubble and there he lies in the street, dead. A child dies of starvation and dehydration, her body laid next to the man in the street. This is the picture of you and me from birth; spiritually dead. But in the water of baptism the Holy Spirit races in and does mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. He breathes into us and our heart starts beating and our mind starts working. And we’re alive! It’s like we’re reborn! That’s what the Spirit does in Baptism. He brings us from spiritual death and makes us alive again! He takes us from being a child of wrath to a child of our heavenly Father. Through no cooperation of our own, He gives us a life we would not have had on our own. He places us on the path that leads to life with God forever.

We know he saves us through baptism, but how does it work? Paul explains further, **God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom God poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.** The answer = through Jesus. Jesus is the reason baptism gives life. The Father

couldn't love us without Jesus. The Spirit couldn't renew us without Jesus. Jesus was the key. Jesus provided the perfect life God expected from us; Jesus endured the punishment and death God demanded of us. Jesus gave his Father a reason to forgive us—he was the reason. Jesus gave the Spirit a reason to renew us—he was the reason. Jesus stands behind baptism gives this special washing its power. Jesus stands behind you.

What does Jesus give us through baptism? **Having been justified** (declared right) **by his grace, we become heirs having the hope of eternal life.** Baptism gives us justification – the declaration from the Father that we are not guilty of our sins for Christ's sake. Not only that, but Paul tells us that we have become heirs, having the hope of heaven, this hope is not a pious wish, like "I hope my football team wins today," but a sure certainty, and so we say with confidence, "I've been baptized, heaven is mine!"

In our new church we have plans to place a Christ candle in the chancel with the font, altar and pulpit. Next year on this very Sunday, God willing, we will light that candle, and at every baptism. It will be lit at every funeral, and every Easter Sunday morning. The Christ candle has a deep theological symbolism. From the moment of our baptism until the moment we close our eyes in death, we are connected to the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus begins our life in him, and with Jesus we will enter the gates of eternal life. And all this comes to be in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.