

## “Baptism Now Saves You”

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

I got a lot of comments about my sermon last week and the news that the bass guitar player for the heavy metal band Megadeth has enrolled at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and is studying to be a Lutheran pastor, the question has arisen, “What it is that we pastors learn at the Seminary?” I firmly believe that the most important thing that I learned is that I know nothing . . . and to learn to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The more that I learn about God, the more I realized that God is incomprehensible and I really don’t know much at all.

I had a really good start to my week. On Monday, I was asked to come and baptize a man literally on his death bed – as he was dying of cancer and had but a few days to live. Friday morning, I heard the news the Lord had called him home. The new life in Baptism always brings joy, but this was an especially good day in the life of a pastor. I don’t often get to see immediate results in the work that is done.

The man who I baptized, his name was Scott. He is now with his Lord and Savior enjoying the inheritance promised to all of God’s baptized faithful.

However, the rest of my week has been one of angst, frustration, and fervent prayer pondering how I was going to handle dealing with the necessary conversation to come. You see, I was asked to conduct the

baptism because Scott's pastor from The Crossing refused to do it, because Scott couldn't be immersed – as if it is the amount of water that makes a baptism valid or the manner in which the water is applied. It is, after all, the Word of God joined with that water that makes it a Sacrament.

Writing this sermon was such a challenge. When I got that call Monday morning, I had already gotten a good start – focusing on Paul's words from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. After having the blessed task of applying the Word of God joined with the water to wash away the sins of a man preparing to die, I reread the lessons for today and knew that I had to start over.

I do not like speaking negatively of others, especially in a public venue, but for the sake of those who are being deceived by false teaching, if I were to remain silent, I would be guilty of covering up evil and allowing the faithful to be led astray.

I was thankful that God provided today's Epistle lesson to keep me balanced. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." God did not bring us into this world to trumpet our own knowledge, intellect, or accomplishments. And we have no reason or right to do so, because everything that we possess in this temporary life is feeble and imperfect. Everyone makes mistakes. As a pastor, I have not always exercised perfect judgment. Besides, as St. Paul says: "If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know."

I give thanks to God that one of God's children called me and said, "My neighbor is in this situation, he desires to be baptized, and his pastor won't do it, because they can't use enough water." That is being a true neighbor.

When I got back to the office on Monday, my first instinct was to call up one of the pastors from The Crossing, with whom I have had conversations in the past, and say, “What are you thinking? This man is dying, desires to be baptized, and you say ‘no, you will be fine. It’s in God’s hands.’” Even a Sunday School child knows Baptism saves. St. Peter tells us that in his first epistle, when he says, “Baptism now saves you” [1 Pt. 3:21]. By the way, I did call that pastor from The Crossing; Unfortunately we have played phone tag the past couple days; But we will have that conversation and I am going to email him this sermon.

But this episode is not about me. I give thanks to God that one of His baptized children from Our Redeemer showed love for this dying man. The Word and Sacrament ministry of the church is an ongoing act of love. God’s love and compassion for His dying people (and we are all dying); His love and compassion for you is seen in the daily renewal you experience through the ongoing washing away of your sins in the faith of your Baptism.

God’s love for you is seen in His Word of promise and the fulfillment of that promise in the sending of His Son to suffer and die, so that God’s dying people will rise with Christ. God’s love for you is seen in the broken body and shed blood of our Lord in which we participate this day. Sharing the Gospel through Word and Sacrament is an ongoing act of love conducted by the people of God.

What got my ire up this week is that, in my 16 years of pastoral ministry, this denial of Baptism is the most unloving, uncaring act I have ever seen from a fellow member of the clergy. This is something which has eternal

consequences for Scott. But, you see, The Crossing has a stated doctrine concerning Baptism (but they don't call it doctrine, because they don't do all that "doctrine stuff").

In their eyes, I am not baptized. I was only "sprinkled" as a child. As an adult, I would then have to make my own decision to "find" Jesus – because in their world the sheep have to go out and find the shepherd. And then I would have to be submerged in a sufficient amount of water – again, as if the water did the cleansing and not the Word of God joined with the water.

Scott did not fit their ideal, so they were going to leave him to fend for himself. At this point in my sermon writing, I had to edit greatly, because my sinful, cynical side was in danger of breaking the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment. It was very funny, but that which is sinful is always inappropriate.

I will say I have been engaged in conversations among some here in Quincy concerning whether or not The Crossing can be considered a Christian church. I have argued that they are still within the church because the marks of the church, God's Word and Sacraments, although misapplied out of ignorance, were still being applied. I am no longer sure of my opinion. Again, I profess to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified. I am thankful that it is not my place to judge.

But false teaching and false belief are very serious issues. Having good doctrine or bad doctrine is not just a philosophical conversation that takes place in academic settings. When bad doctrine is inflicted upon someone, it has real world consequences. It very often has eternal consequences. Bad doctrine always translates into bad practices.

Luther says that false teaching is the worst offense against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment. God's Name is only holy among us when His Word is spoken in its truth and purity. And there is warning against this. We heard in the appointed lessons for today, "the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die" [Deut. 18:20]. God has always taken this very seriously.

I am reminded of what we discussed at our Confirmation retreat last weekend. Our theme was "Spiritual Warfare". We talked about truth and propaganda. If you take all the battles in history, lies and propaganda have caused more defeats than any other weapon.

For this reason, in the past, I reached out to one of the young pastors from The Crossing who plays volleyball and another one who plays baseball with Pastor Mueller. I suggested that the four of us get together on a regular basis and discuss Scripture and the doctrine of the church. My invitation has not been enthusiastically received. I offered my time (time I really don't have) because our last conversation was concerning their false teaching concerning Baptism.

I feared something like this would happen. My example then was our own Sophia Brown who I baptized down at St. Louis Children's Hospital. According to the teachings at The Crossing, because of Sophia's physical and mental challenges, this child is not and never would be ready for Baptism. Like Scott, she would be left to fend for herself.

Christ died for Sophia. Christ died for Scott. And someone who

claims to come in the name of Christ was going to let Scott die without Baptism.

I thank God that one of His children had the courage, conviction, the knowledge, the faith, and the love for Scott to know that Scott needed to be baptized. Having sound doctrine is not about having “knowledge that puffs up” so we can say, “We know more than you do.” This act of looking out for your neighbor was a great demonstration of the “love [that] builds up.”

I had a really good start to my week. Scott had an even better start to his week, and by the grace of God, and the washing away of his sin, and the new life he has in Christ, Scott’s week has come to a blessed end. Amen.