

“Baptism Now Saves You”

1Peter 3:13-22

Christ is Risen!! He is Risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

With the school year drawing to a close, I only have a few more days to teach the 6th grade religion class at St. James. They had been prodding me for weeks to talk about demon possession. So, this past Monday, since I promised that we would get to talk about it at some point this year; on Monday, we dealt with it, but probably not in the way that they were expecting.

This was not a recounting of the movie *The Exorcist* or anything like that. We talked about how your body is a house. Jesus describes your body as an empty house without a spirit. The Bible speaks of three spiritual options for the house of your body. The first option is for you to remain all by yourself. Remain an empty house. “I and I alone own this body.” Paul says in Galatians 5, those who are ruled by the flesh have “the desires of the flesh [which] are against the Spirit . . . The works of the flesh are evident [and he gives a whole list of what those works are]. . . [and] those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” Gal. 5:16-26.

It is like what Jesus says in our Gospel lesson. The world, your flesh on its own cannot receive the Spirit of Truth. But you know Him;

He dwells in you; and He will be and remain in you. Thankfully, you are not an empty house.

Being an empty house is not the best option, because, as Jesus says in Lk.11:24-26, without the Spirit of God dwelling in you, your body is an empty house in which an evil spirit may come and inhabit and decide to stay. And, by the way, this remains a major problem in the world today. The pastors of the Lutheran Church of Madagascar (which is bigger than the LCMS) deal with this all the time because inviting spirits into your body is standard practice among the pagans of that country. I personally know two pastors who have dealt with this here in America. Our “sophisticated” society doesn’t want to consider this, but it is real. It is dangerous to be an empty house.

The best option, and really the only good option, is for your body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. So long as the Holy Spirit is dwelling within you, you have no reason to fear any other spirit entering your house. That was the point I was trying to make with the 6th graders. No demon, not even Satan himself can reach into you and pull the Holy Spirit out. There is no room for him in your house.

This brought us to another question. How do I know that the Holy Spirit is in me and I am not an empty house? What if I don’t feel very “full of the Spirit” today? What does Peter say, “Baptism now saves you.”

Don’t put your confidence in yourself; in how you feel today; in how you feel any day. Because how you feel is going to change from day to day. We have one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and

Father of all who does not change from day to day. And the grace of God has come to you from outside of you.

The Word of God joined with that water hits you in the face and Baptism now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body; Baptism now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Like I said last week, Baptism equals Jesus. Have confidence in the grace of God received at your Baptism. Have confidence in the resurrection of the body. Jesus says in our Gospel reading, “Because I live, you also will live.”

Again, have confidence in this Word of promise. Faith comes by hearing the external Word of God. As Paul writes in 2 Tim. 3:16 “All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, etc.” Have confidence in the Word of God. This is where He has chosen to speak to you.

When doubts creep in; when your house doesn't feel very full, say to yourself, say to anyone who will listen, “I am baptized.” In our confirmation questioning, I ask the confirmands, “If Christ returned today, are you sure that you would be saved?” And the best answer, which is so wonderful to hear them offer each year, is, “Yes, because I believe and I am baptized.”

Baptism now saves you. Your house is not empty – even when you are not feeling very full of the Spirit. It is like David's words from Ps. 51 following the whole Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite incident, “Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.”

David had been brought low by the words of the prophet Nathan who showed him his sin. David was not feeling very “full of the Spirit,” yet David knew the truth that God has not taken His Holy Spirit from him. David’s sin, as high-handed and in-your-face as it was to God, his sin did not exclude him from the grace of God. David wrongfully took another man’s wife and then killed the man to cover up his sin, but God did not “take His Holy Spirit from him.”

God sent his prophet Nathan to speak His Word to David – in no uncertain terms. And David confesses his sin. And David receives God’s gracious word of forgiveness from Nathan the prophet – in the same way the absolution is spoken in the church today. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and we receive all of this through the Word alone.

Baptism now saves you because the Word of God is combined with that water and comes to you. Paul then speaks of Baptism as “a washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit” Titus 3. It is a washing of new life where you are filled with the Holy Spirit. Your house is not empty. Baptism now saves you. You are filled with the Spirit of Truth. Have confidence in this Word of God.

Have confidence in your Baptism. Have confidence in the words of the Absolution. Have confidence in the God-breathed Word of Scripture. Have confidence in the body and blood of Christ broken and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. As the hymn writer says, “Jesus is my confidence.” Amen.

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