

Cornel Barnett
Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
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Genesis 1:1-5; Mark 1:4-11; Acts 19:1-6a
“Reaffirming the Spirit of Baptism”

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord Sunday which is ordinarily celebrated earlier in the month. At the end of this sermon we will reaffirm our baptismal covenant with a ritual adapted from the *Book of Common Worship*.

In the sermon I will speak about the spirit of baptism which is basically pointers about baptism. Anything one says about Christian baptism is about the Holy Spirit working in our lives as attested in scripture: John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance whereas baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus is baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The statement that most typifies this is the one on the cover of the bulletin from an older *Book of Order* that “Baptism heralds a new beginning of participation in the ministry of Christ for all who are baptized. Such participation initiated in Baptism then becomes an ever-expanding process, setting Christians on a journey which lasts the whole course of their lives.” The Christian path is the path of the Holy Spirit.

There are many facets of baptism which we cannot cover in this sermon or even in a baptismal ceremony. I shall highlight a few aspects to give a sense and taste of the Infinite. This is not a structured sermon. Comments and illustrations are randomly selected.

One of the deepest experiences I’ve had in the church is witnessing a baptism. I was an associate pastor in a church and the pastor was conducting a baptism. During the baptism a light shone through the window on the pastor, baby and parents. It wasn’t an ordinary light. It was the light of God. Mystically, God shone on this engrafting into Christ and the child’s incorporation into the church.

Some early churches designed the baptismal font as a womb and stated that a through the womb of the mother the baby was born into the world of light and air and through the womb of baptism the baby was born into the church. The first birth was into the immediate family and the second into the church family.

Nurtured before our birth in our mother’s womb, water is a part of our very being. In the dawn of time, life began in the water of the sea, and

the sea remains a part of every living cell. Water is a common and essential part of every day. It's no wonder then that one is baptized through water, the primordial element as indicated in Genesis.

Water is sprinkled or poured on the baptized. Or, in some traditions a person is wholly immersed in a tub, pool, lake or ocean. I went surfing in LA once and witnessed a baptism off-shore nearby. I assimilated the baptism, getting a sense of what it felt like by ducking under the water next to my surfboard, and it was good. In going under I participated in Christ's death and emerged into Christ's life expressed beautifully in surfing.

In Jewish religion male adherents are incorporated into the faith community through circumcision. Women are born into Judaism and become religious Jews by practicing the Jewish religion or by conversion. Baptism is the equivalent of circumcision but less painful and both women and men are baptized. We baptize all ages.

According to Harold M. Daniels in an excellent book published by the Joint Office of Worship of our denomination, *Worship in the Community of Faith*, (1982), "Baptism is a celebration of God's love which is freely given to all. It is a clear expression that God has taken the initiative in dealing with humanity. God's love is a gift. It can never be earned.

"In being baptized, we do not need to prove that we deserve to be baptized. Baptism is not an award for faith. It is God's action that is central, not ours. Baptism is done *to us*; we receive it. It is not something we do for ourselves.

"In baptism the love God has for all humankind is made personal and specific. *I* am baptized. *I* am accepted. It is *my* name that is spoken, and the water is poured over *me*. *I* am addressed, and *I* am told that *I* am accepted. My baptism is the seal of *my* acceptance by God.

"This love of God that precedes us is clearly expressed when infants are baptized. Since an infant is not yet able to respond to God in faith, the baptism of an infant is a dramatic sign of the reality that God accepts us before we accept God, and that we do not earn the right to be baptized.

"The Reformed tradition has never discounted the necessity of a believing, accepting response, but it has always placed the emphasis upon God's grace which precedes every human response. Apart from God's prior grace no human response to God is possible."

Finally, I turn to the encouraging words of the Brief Statement of Faith, found in our *Book of Confessions*.

The...Spirit

“claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the church.

“In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives...”

Here, we end the message and begin the part of the sermon where we reaffirm our baptismal covenant. If you have not been baptized enjoy the ceremony and consider being baptized.

Please turn to your insert for the “Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant” order. You will speak the bold print.

Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant

SCRIPTURE SENTENCES

Hear these words from Holy Scripture: 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27

Just as the body is one
and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many,
are one body,
so it is with Christ.

For in the one Spirit
we were all baptized into one body—
Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—
and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Now you are the body of Christ
and individually members of it.

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks, Eternal God,
 for you nourish and sustain all living things
 by the gift of water.
 In the beginning of time,
 your Spirit moved over the watery chaos,
 calling forth order and life.

In the time of Noah,
 You destroyed evil by the waters of the flood,
 giving righteousness a new beginning.

You led Israel out of slavery,
 through the waters of the sea,
 into the freedom of the promised land.

In the waters of Jordan
 Jesus was baptized by John
 and anointed with your Spirit.
 By the baptism of his own death and resurrection,
 Christ set us free from sin and death,
 and opened the way to eternal life.

**We thank you, O God, for the water of baptism.
 In it we were buried with Christ in his death.
 From it we were raised to share in his resurrection,
 Through it we were reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son,
 we celebrate our fellowship in him in faith.**

We pray that all who have passed through the water of baptism
 may continue forever in the risen life
 of Jesus Christ our Savior.
 To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit,
 be all honor and glory, now and forever.
Amen.

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

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

THE PEACE

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
And also with you.