

## “Rinsed and Ready”

Isa. 43:1-7, Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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OK, as is often my habit, we'll start with a question (NO bad puns this time!) *“How many times do you bathe in a week?”* All right, maybe a BIT too personal. Let's try this: *“WHY is it important to bathe regularly?”* **Physical health.** Wash away germs, bacteria. **Social.** No one wants to be around a smelly person, right? **Mental health.** Prepares you for the day to come. Makes you FEEL better. Speaking for myself (always the best one to do that for ☺), a good hot shower helps me to feel like I am getting rid of the old 'junk' and 'grime' of my past day, and **invigorates** me in **preparation** for the **new day** that lies ahead. A **cleansing**, or 'purification,' of mind, body, and spirit in being **ready** to **'face the world'**...

So, therefore, the act of 'bathing' is not merely about the physical 'ACT' involving soap and water... but the PURPOSE it fulfills. What it LEADS to. What it PREPARES us for. But let me ask you this: As great as you feel when you get out of that bath or shower, are you ready to walk out the door to face the world? Uh, NOOO! You still need to **'clothe'** yourself before you **head out** into the day that lies ahead. You must be **ready** for the weather **conditions** that you will encounter. Your **preparation process** is *not quite complete*...

It is just this aspect of our **preparation** for venturing out into the world being **incomplete** with simply the 'application' of water that struck me in reading BOTH of the New Testament passages for today. In the reading from Acts, it speaks of new converts to Christianity in Samaria...home, of course, to the 'Samaritans,' that group so despised by the Jews. That conversion through Christian baptism wasn't enough, however... it was necessary that Peter and John go and pray that they might ALSO receive the Holy Spirit... because, ***“as yet... they had ONLY been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*** (Acts 8:16)

And then, in our passage from Luke's Gospel, John the Baptist, recognizing the excitement of the crowd who thought that he might be the promised Messiah, 'threw some water' on their 'fervent hopes' when he said that ***“I baptize you with water, but the one more powerful than I is coming... (and) He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*** (Luke 3:16)

From the one who would **prepare** the way for the Lord, to the ones commissioned to **continue** in the ways of His ministry, there would clearly appear to be TWO components to this

'rite of passage' for new believers known as **baptism**. First, the washing of water... and then, 'separate but equal'... another 'anointing,' the baptism of the **Holy Spirit**. So, as those who profess to be 'believers' in Christ... perhaps not-so-'new', but ALWAYS in need of 're-new-al'... it is important for us to consider the dual aspects of our 'baptismal identity.'

As those who have experienced water baptism... (and if you have NOT, like that investment guy on TV says, '*we should talk*')... we must not ignore the role of the Holy Spirit. That 'fuel' that keeps the 'engine' of our daily lives empowered to do the ministry we are called by God to do. We may have been 'bathed'... but are we 'clothed?' You and I must ask ourselves: 'I am **rinsed**... but am I **ready**?'

Now, I know that us 'decent and good order' Presbyterians can get a little 'antsy' when it comes to discussions of the Holy Spirit. Let's face it, when we talk about Pentecost, that time when the H.S. was so visibly active in the life of believers, we would much rather **sing** the church 'Happy Birthday' than '**sing** the virtues' of the empowering work of God's Spirit. And yet, our 'manual of operations' for the life of the church, the Book of Order, has some clear words about the work of the Spirit, particularly at baptism...

*"Baptism signifies ... the **washing away of sin, rebirth, putting on the fresh garment of Christ, being sealed** by God's Spirit."* (Book of Order, G-2.3). Baptism is Not only about the 'cleansing' aspect, but the rebirth, regeneration, the 'fresh clothes of Christ,' which is 'sealed' by the Holy Spirit. In the really old days, an official message had wax used to close the envelope, and a 'seal' embossed in the wax to show just who it was from. In the same way, the 'message' of Christ that we carry must have the 'official seal,' that 'stamp' of the Holy Spirit, to fully communicate just WHO it is from. Not US... but the one who dwells within us.

Further in that same 'fount of wisdom' the Book of Order, we read that in Baptism, Christ was *"**anointed with the Holy Spirit to undertake the way of the servant.**"* (G-2.3) When the Father '*anointed*' His Son with the Holy Spirit, in the form of that dove, are we to assume that Jesus did NOT have the power of the Spirit within him until that moment? Hmmm... I don't know. As good friend David Landreneau's Uncle Jimmy says, *"I'm not sure I understand all that I know about that."* Because of the undivided nature of the Trinity... Father Son and Holy Spirit... I have always thought as the three being pretty inextricable. I mean, when a 12-year-

old Jesus was discussing Scripture in the synagogue with all of those learned teachers of the Law, I would have to think the Spirit was with him then, wouldn't you? I seem to recall Jesus saying, ***"I and the Father are one"***...

But just as Jesus was without sin, and didn't NEED to have them ceremoniously washed, perhaps that Holy Spirit came down more as a sign to the 'students' than to the 'Teacher.' That it was not enough to simply have a human symbolically wash one's sins away. That to be able to continue to live a life less controlled by that sin, there was a DIVINE presence necessary. Not simply a **practice** by man... but a **power** from GOD.

In Luke we read that ***"when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."***(Luke 3:21-22)

This is significant in so many ways. One is that when God the Father spoke from heaven on the occasion of His Son's baptism, the Divine Sonship of Christ was announced in a most vivid, dramatic way. There is perhaps NO clearer depiction of the **Trinity** than this event. The **Father** speaking to the **Son**... sending down the **Spirit**. Three-in-one.

But aside from such a clear statement on the nature of the Godhead, it also sends a message to those watching this event. No matter that Jesus was in essence GOD, His Father expressed his pleasure at the **obedience** of the Son to be an example to mankind. Jesus submitted to **baptism** at the hands of a **man**. He submitted his **prayers** into the hands of **God**. And God rewarded that obedience by declaring publicly His love, and sending a miraculous sign to further empower his service to those people. *"to undertake the way of a servant."*

But we must NOT stop there! The ability to serve given to Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is also for US... AND not only to **possess**, but to **pass along**! As that same 'BoO' goes on to say, ***"the disciples were empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit to undertake a life of service..."*** And an important part of that service is empowering others to live out their baptismal identity... by the Spirit at work in their lives. Not only to be **ripped**, but **READY!**

When the Disciples heard about some Samaritans who had been converted to Christianity, and baptized... you remember, those neighbors that most Jews had an intense dislike for... they knew that the rite of baptism would NOT be complete until they received the

Holy Spirit. So they traveled far from their homes to **pray** for them... remember, like Jesus was doing when the Spirit/Dove came upon Him... so that they might receive that same Spirit! And after they prayed over them... which included the laying on of hands...as we did for our new officers last week... we read that ***“they received the Holy Spirit.”*** (Acts 8:17)

OK, ‘Frozen Chosen,’ what does all this talk of ‘laying on of hands’ and praying in and for the Holy Spirit do for US?! To make the **HOLY SPIRIT** more prominent in our practice of the Christian faith *‘EVERY DAY.’* Which also means to make **PRAYER** more prominent in our daily practice of our faith. When a fellow believer... of your ‘flavor’ of Christianity OR NOT... is struggling with an ‘opportunity’ in their life—PRAY WITH them. Pray that the Holy Spirit **guide** them, **empower** them. **Lay your hand on their shoulder** to Give them strength to face whatever situation they might be facing. Remind them that they, like Jesus, are God the Father’s **beloved child**. Remind them that Jesus is their **example**, their **friend**. AND, remind them of the Holy Spirit’s **power** to help guide and comfort them. As YOU rely more and more on a strength greater than your own, you in turn are to pass along that strength to OTHERS who are weak... ones who may be ‘rinsed’... but are not ‘ready’...

At the beginning of this message we considered our personal ‘rinse cycles’ known as baths. When I had the discussion at Villa Maria about the *frequency* of those baths, many of them laughed and said that when they were growing up, *“Once a week, on Saturday night, whether we needed it or not.”* Now, whether or not that it is STILL the case we won’t get into. But, even at that rate, that would be 52 times a year. The **cleansing** we do for our **physical** bodies needs to be done on a regular basis, in order to best go out into the world in a **healthy** fashion... in ‘mind, body, and spirit.’ In the same way, our **spiritual** bodies need to be ‘cleansed’ on a ‘regular basis.’ If we are to be ‘healthy’ as we go out into the world, we must *consistently* be ‘washed’ in the blood, the sanctifying Spirit of Christ. Without it, you won’t be fully prepared for the days that lie ahead. So, I encourage you, PLEASE, take a bath in Jesus... MORE than ‘once a week.’ By His Spirit, you too can hear those words of the Father, ***“This is my child, my beloved; in him... in her... I am well-pleased.”*** And may all God’s beloved children say, ‘AMEN.’

**CHARGE: Baptism is bowing before the Father and letting him do the work. –Max Lucado**