

Message Delivered from the Baptistry, Right After a Baptism

First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, October 4, 2020
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Romans 6: 1-11

A year ago our congregation hosted
a class of 10 seminary students and one teacher
from Candler School of Theology at Emory University.
Everyone who comes here gets what I call the nickel tour.

The nickel tour begins, of course, right here.
In the Sanctuary.
In front of the Communion Table and Baptistry.
Every time.
Because here is where we ground ourselves
in the Word and Will of God.
Here is where we gather to connect with the Holy Spirit and one another.
Here is where we remember our baptism with Christ.
Here is where we meet the Living Christ
to serve one another at the Lord's Table as He first served us.

The same Spirit which baptized Jesus Christ
forever identifies us with Him,
calling us to follow in his wake.
Through Baptism into Christ we are ordained into Christian ministry.
We are ordained through our baptisms into Christian ministry,
to become witnesses, ambassadors, teachers, models,
and instruments of peace.
This is the reason our church bulletin reads:
Ministers: All the People.
We're all ministers, ordained by our baptisms.
Baptized, we rise dripping wet
to be led forth by the Spirit into the world.

On the nickel tour with the seminary students,
as we stood around the Sanctuary talking,
we learned that most every one of them
had been baptized as an infant.
None of the seminarians had been baptized at an age of understanding,

or personally experienced what is known as a believer's baptism.
They expressed curiosity about baptism by immersion at an age of understanding.

We have practiced believers' baptism
while seeking unity with those who practice differently.
You see, "Believer's baptism recognizes and upholds people's freedom
to affirm faith in Jesus Christ for themselves."[\[1\]](#)

At our best,
we Disciples have been a most unusual combination
of radical discipleship and ecumenical openness.

We have preached a costly faith
without claiming that we have the last word on it:
[we are] Christians only, but not the only Christians."[\[2\]](#)

Disciples resist the temptation of so many religions to believe
as "if God were theirs,
rather than the other way around."[\[3\]](#)

Through baptism "we are free from claiming our identity
or self-worth through things that are transient;
we are free to live no longer for ourselves alone."[\[4\]](#)

Like the Apostle Paul, we celebrate that baptism does not end mortality;
it begins a new morality."[\[5\]](#)

Recall the Bible story of Philip and his encounter with an Ethiopian.

So touched, so moved was the Ethiopian
about the story of God's love for him
that as they went by a river, he exclaimed,
*"Look, here is water!
What is to prevent me from being baptized?"*

Just as the church is to have no barriers,
just as the Word of God is freely given, freely received,
so, too, is the rite of baptism open to one and all.

Look, here is water!

What is to prevent you from being baptized?

Look, here is the Bread and the Cup!

What is to prevent you from dining with Jesus Christ?

Look, here is the whole people of God!

What is to prevent you from connecting your life with a community of faith?

While touring the sanctuary,

a seminary student got excited when she saw the baptistry.

"Oh, can we see it?" she said, and hopped up and down a little bit.

"Can we go in?"

My friends, you don't have to ask me twice.

Here is water; what is to stop us from going in?

So, Associate Pastor Anna Brewer-Calvert and I
led them to the second floor,
and then down the flight of stairs into the baptistry.
One flight of steps only goes down into the water,
for we die with Christ,
and the other only goes up,
for the baptized rise with Christ into new life.

Envision the scene.

Early Monday morning.

Ten adult students, their teacher, two Disciples clergy.

All crowded in the baptistry,

all of us imagining it filled with water up to our hips.

Using mime and the liturgy,

I demonstrated the form

and unpacked the function of believer's baptism.

Any questions?

"Yes," said a seminarian. *"What do you do if someone is disabled,
and he or she can't get into this baptistry?"*

I'll share how Anna and I addressed the question:

There are alternative venues and other means of baptism available
that suit such a situation

—carrying them into the baptistry, or dipping in a larger pool,
or sprinkling with holy water.

What matters the most is the activity of God that moves inside out.

Baptism is an outer expression of an inner conviction.

What matters most is the inner conviction.

This is what God does through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Holy waters that once cleansed our bodies and souls, minds and lives
continue to be at work and play.

God uses us, works through us, empowers us

to ask the question and do the follow through.

How can we better share the love of God

with people who are not present, here, now;

with those who are marginalized, left out, not being served;

with those who desire, deserve, demand to be loved?

Flip through your Bible, Old and New Testaments, take your pick.

You will witness page after page, story after story, testimony after testimony
from people who are on the margins of society

being seen and heard by Jesus and the prophets and apostles.

People who are invisible to society

suddenly find themselves being loved, served, included,
discovering to their amazement that they belong.

We all belong.

Everyone belongs.

In the Bible, in our cities and nations today,

it's the folks that society dismisses

who, when they do speak up, show up, stand up,

become God's change agents

that for the change society so desperately needs.

All thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Folks go forth, rejoicing on the way.

What is to prevent us from doing the same?

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1] Kinnamon and Linn. P 52.

[2] Ibid. P 59.

[3] Ibid. P 59.

[4] Ibid. P 56.

[5] Leander Keck, Romans, 2005, P. 161. Quoted in Kinnamon & Linn.