

Baptism and New Creation

by Michael Flowers

Michael Flowers explores the sacrament of baptism as a transformative act that symbolizes new creation and our incorporation into the body of Christ.

Duration: 22:25

Scripture: Genesis 1:1

Topics: "Baptism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the significance of baptism and the deep roots it has in Christianity. He emphasizes that baptism is a participation in Christ's risenness and a means of communion with God. The speaker also highlights the importance of giving thanks and acknowledging the true nature of things through thanksgiving. He explains that water is a symbol of purification and that the blessing of baptismal water holds a cosmic and redemptive significance. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the ancient and profound nature of baptism and the importance of gratitude in our relationship with God.

Transcript

That's it. Okay. And we need a light bulb because if this is the testimony of the fullness of oil in our church, we're in trouble.

We pulled this out and we didn't test it, but we're doing a baptism today and we pull out the Paschal Candle for that, so Lord, we have more oil than this, I think. Anyway, today I'm going to share just briefly about the sacrament of baptism. There's so much to say about baptism and I'm going to front load it with what we mean by the sacrament of baptism and what we do in the liturgy, what we're getting ready to do through the baptismal liturgy, just to give a little bit of insight of why we emphasize certain things.

And it all begins with water. Life begins with water. Life begins in water.

We come out breaking water, screaming, you know, out of the watery womb. And we just wondered, where am I? You know, in that bright artificial light, we come out of that comforting place where we're just gasping for breath. And so we have this primal experience with water.

Creation story itself begins before anything had been fully created, except the earth. Right. In the heavens, it said before any creeping thing or humans were created, it says that the spirit was hovering over the waters, this sort of abyss, this chaotic, formless void.

But it is watery. And in the beginning, it says God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water. It's a nice picture of something getting ready to happen.

And so our story here presents the initial earth as clay and water and that clay and that water unformed is awaiting the potter to envision his next move in that story. The idea here presents creation itself as a transformation of water into life from the chaos of nonexistence to diverse life forms. Water is present in all the redemptive stories in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

As you will remember, the song of Moses, as they say, as they went through the Passover and they crossed through the Red Sea and Paul St. Paul picks up on this and he grabs that as a type of Christian baptism passing through the Red Sea. It says in First Corinthians 10, verse one and one through four, for I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them. And the rock was Christ and the rock was Christ.

This is a way of reading back into our Old Testament scriptures, the presence of Jesus there the whole time. And this is the way the church has read the Old Testament. In fact, we had the Old Testament in the Christian church before we had the New Testament.

And so it was interpreted this way as scriptures, as New Testament scriptures were being formed. They were seeing Jesus right in the beginning. And the Holy Spirit and the father, the Trinity, you know, in that redemption, we also remember Joshua crossing the Jordan, that water, that prophetic water, that picture.

Jesus, the new Joshua, baptized in the Jordan, his first miracle, that wedding in Cana of Galilee, turning the water into wine. And then his final act on the cross, where water and blood pour from his side, restoring and here's a word, rehydrating the earth itself. God's water, rehydrating the earth itself and redeeming and restoring all creation.

That's what salvation is. It's the healing of all creation. And so in the ancient church, baptism begins with the blessing of the water.

For in the blessing, we enact our original design. And this is now we're pulling from some of the theology of the body, JP2, that we've been going through, where God has come, Jesus has come to restore us to the purity of our origins. Many began the gospel with all have sinned.

That's not where the gospel begins. It begins in Genesis one and two with our original design and the purity of our origins. That's where we're being restored to.

And so baptism begins to deal with this original design. And that original design is for us all to be priests and stewards of creation. We're all to be priests and stewards of new creation as well in Jesus.

And we we bless the water. We bless the bread. We bless the wine.

We bless our children. We bless the oil, et cetera. We're people of blessing, right? Breaking the curse of sin.

And restoring creation to its original design when we bless and we got it from God. Genesis two, three. So God blessed.

God blessed the seventh day. And in the blessing made it holy. And that's what we're called to do, right, is make things holy again, set apart for the Lord.

The earth is the Lord's in the fullness thereof and all that dwell therein. And when we bless, we reclaim what belongs to him. It all belongs to him and it's all connected in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

God becomes a human being. And so when we bless the water, it becomes something. It becomes not something.

Let me say this. When we bless this water today, it becomes not something different than water, but it is restored to what is originally meant to be a gift of life. Water has been given to us as a gift of life, and it's a sacrament of the Holy Spirit.

The flowing and out of our inmost being shall flow rivers of living water. He's speaking of the Holy Spirit, and so we like to say this matter matters, matter really matters. Christ, the new Adam and his incarnation is restoring creation to its original design, and Christ is restoring us to the purity of our origins as male and female.

Ancient Christianity uses ordinary elements of water, oil, bread, wine and so forth and offers them back up in blessing in return. To their original purpose, their original design, the range of salvation extends far beyond the individual to the whole universe, the whole of the groaning of creation itself. And so water is the matter of the sacrament.

Water is the matter of the sacrament of baptism today because it stands for the whole of the created order. Water is symbolizing the whole of the created order, which in baptism is the sign and presence of the world. And so water is the symbol of life itself, physically and spiritually.

Jesus tells us that out of our inmost being, I've already said it, shall flow rivers of living water. Speaking of the spirit, water is also the symbol of destruction. The sea and the ocean in the Old Testament is always portrayed as chaotic, just very, very fearful thing to be caught in those waves and that tide and just be destroyed in the crashing.

And so it's a symbol of destruction, chaos and death. And this is why Jesus calms the sea in that chaotic moment out there on the Sea of Galilee. He speaks to it and he says, go back to your original design.

Peace be still. And finally, it is the symbol of purification. Water is the symbol of purification, the washing Paul uses in Ephesians five, the washing of the water of the word.

Purification, therefore, the baptismal water represents the matter of the universe, the matter of the cosmos, the world as life, the blessing of the baptismal water takes on a deep cosmic and redemptive significance. Why? How? God created the world and blessed it and gave it to man and woman as their food, something very basic to all of us. We need food.

I need a little less of it, but we need food and it's good. It's good stuff that God has given us. And so God created the world and blessed it and gave it to man and woman as their food, as the means of communion with him.

So we bless our food. We enter back into communion with him when we bless the elements, when we bless the water. It's a means of communion with him.

You see, the blessing of the water signifies the redemption and return of matter to this initial and essential meaning. This is not magic. This is not magic.

It is a divine means of reclaiming the purity of our origin by submitting to John's baptism. Christ sanctified the waters, made it holy, the water of purification and reconciliation with God. It was here in coming up out of the water of the Jordan that the first epiphany took place, the new and redemptive revelation of God, the father, the son and the Holy Spirit show up and have distinctive roles as one God, father, son and Holy Spirit.

And so this spirit that came upon Jesus in his baptism, he was at the beginning of creation. He moved upon the face of the waters and he made water into what he purposed in the beginning. The second Adam in this is enacting new creation.

This is the first mode of new creation in Jesus Christ. This is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. And so the blessing, what does that mean? We've talked about water.

We've talked about why and how we view water and matter in and of itself. And now the blessing, what does that mean? It just means to give thanks. It's all it means.

We just give thanks. It's very simple. This is simple and so often neglected.

Right. I give up complaints. I get so many.

I complain so much. The AC in our house went out two days ago and we were just like going nuts, you know, trying to be thankful. It was so hard to be thankful in a hot house, you know.

So to bless is to give thanks. So basic and fundamental is this act of giving thanks that we might easily miss its impact in and through thanksgiving. We acknowledge the true nature of things in and through thanksgiving.

We acknowledge the true nature of things we receive from God. It's a gift. All things are gift grace and we give thanks.

It's only appropriate. It is right and good. This scripture says to give thanks.

It's just right to give thanks. And in giving thanks, we make them to be what they are. We make them to be what they are.

We bless and we sanctify things when we offer them to God as a Eucharistic event. Eucharist means to give thanks. It's a Greek word.

That's what we use for the Eucharist, the communion that we will celebrate today. It's just a word means to give thanks. It's a powerful thing to give thanks.

It's a powerful, liberating thing to be thankful, full of thanks. Maybe that could be a prayer for you today, just for you to be more filled with thanksgiving. We bless and sanctify things when we offer them to God as a Eucharistic event, calling the things that are not as though they were in a sense, you see, because we're

seeing things with the eye of redemption, not with the eye of the curse.

OK, and so today, as we stand before the water, we stand before the universe. With this small token of matter given to us by God, we enact an all encompassing Eucharistic moment which gives the baptismal liturgy its true meaning. Once more, the world is proclaiming to be what Christ revealed and made it to be the gift of God to us.

Hold on to that. The means of our communion with God, this water is manifested to us as the grace of redemption, the forgiveness of sins and the healing of all afflictions. It's what baptism accomplishes in us.

It's the beginning of that reception of the spirit who is acting redemption and healing in us and around us. And so the baptism itself, the baptism itself. I think if we get what I just said, I'll be happy because, you know, we don't have time to do a full teaching on baptism, but we will.

We will. But I've never really fully unpacked the first part of the liturgy yet like this today. So I think it's important for us that we're not we're not doing magical things up here.

This is deep, ancient Christianity, and the church has done this ever since the beginning. You see, it's only a dehydrated form of Christianity that takes all of the enchantment and the wonder and the sacramental grace out. So we have four walls in a sermon, maybe a rock band.

I did that all my life. You know, I went from rock band to worship rock band. Right.

Yeah. But no sense of what I just taught you, and it may even be hard for some of you to grasp or even accept. But I just want to tell you this.

What I just said has been taught and believed for two thousand years, not five hundred years. OK, so praise the Lord. You like it.

I don't want to put you on the spot. I like it. Give me more water and more oil in this thing, please.

I'm crazy. You know that. OK, here we go.

And that's just the grace of God, isn't it, that I can stand up here and just be this crazy guy that loves Jesus and is loved by Jesus. OK, so there's two points here in baptism and then we'll we'll we'll close out. But my wife's going to be here first.

When we're baptized, we are baptized into Christ. It's a participation in Christ, in his risenness, you see. It's a Christ who feel who fills all things by the word of his power.

You see, this this cosmic Christ, we don't know this Christ fully yet, this Christ who is seated at the right hand of the father. This Christ is making every enemy a footstool for his feet and he's ruling and bringing down, as we heard in Colossians today, all the cosmic powers that have turned this earth into a cesspool and he's reclaiming it and he's recreating it. And our little acts of blessing, little pieces of matter and water, those are calling the things that are not as though they were because there will be one day the whole earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord and new creation and new earth and new heavens will be ours to enjoy.

And so we're just enacting that now and calling it forth into the present. And so our little one that's going to be baptized today, we're we're pouring over the waters of baptism so that she might be incorporated, it's a

good word, into Christ Jesus himself. We're offering her to Jesus and Jesus is redeeming her in this sacrament.

But we're also talking about an incorporation not only into Christ, but an incorporation into his church, his body. Right. And that's where so many problems today with people who are de-churched, who just love the heck out of Jesus, that they can't handle the church.

They've been hurt. They've been wounded. And one of the ongoing prophetic words over our church, I just got it from the bishop of Singapore when I was with him last week, never knew me, never did know anything about our church.

And he just said, you know, he was praying over me and he said, your church is going to heal the broken. And I just really want to grab a hold of that, you know, we want to be a place for the broken that can come and be incorporated back into embodiment, not just Jesus out there. There's all kinds of Jesuses out there.

Paul says, if you come preaching another Jesus, let him be accursed. OK, so we're trying to be faithful to the one who is seated at the right hand of the father to be incorporated into his people. Well, that's where it gets really like marriage, like church, like people.

People like Charlie Brown. You know, I love I love humanity. It's just people I have problems with.

So church is not easy. Marriage is not easy. Nothing involving two people is easy.

You have two wills coming together there. Right. And so we want to be a place of healing and incorporate people back in to the body.

Paul says this for in one spirit, we were all baptized into one body. She's being baptized, incorporated. That's in the Latin.

That's what that means to incorporate, to embody corpus. Right. We're incorporating her into a community of a covenant community of faith.

Right. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free. And all were made to drink of one spirit.

And so this baptism is a means by which we are united in Christ's death and resurrection and exodus from old creation into new creation. Baptism is a picture of new creation as the spirit hovers over the waters again and descends. The father secures our adoption as sons and daughters in the completed mission of his son.

He'll make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Let's do it. Could I have the baptismal candidates come forward?

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