

SLIDE 1. ANCHORED: A Study of What We Believe and Why

Teaching: **Article 8: Christian Baptism**

Sunday February 11, 2023

APPETIZER

During one of my interviews with *Crossroads Community Church* in 2004 – to be their Lead Pastor – I was asked (being born and bred in Ontario) – if I was a Toronto Maple Leafs fan, and if so, would I be willing to switch to becoming a Vancouver Canucks fan?

What they could not have known – because they didn't grow up in the GTA – was to be a Leafs fan in the 70s, 80s, and 90s was to suffer year after year of mediocrity as if it were the game plan – because there was no need to make things better – because Leafs home games always sold out.

It was a kind of hockey-fan-curse to live in south-western Ontario at that time – because you could ONLY watch the Leafs!

I explained this to them and then finally answered, "I happily cheer on any team that is playing the Leafs – and so I'd be all too happy to become a Vancouver Canucks fan."

And so, the jersey.

The Church gave it to me upon installing me as their Pastor.

I go to games. I watch them on T.V. I follow the team on my news feeds.

But its the jersey that identifies me as a Canucks fan.

It's a public identification with a hockey organization.

Christian Baptism is like a hockey jersey.

In short – Christian Baptism is an act of obedience to the Scriptures (Mt. 28:19; Acts 2:38) which publicly identifies followers of Jesus Christ with Jesus Christ - as forgiven and cleansed from sin, as freed from the power of sin and death, as given the Holy Spirit to dwell within them, and as united with the body of Christ – which is the church – who we could otherwise call – by comparison – Team Jesus.

Baptism by immersion is a powerful visual that a believer has been washed by the Spirit (as they enter the water), has died with Christ to sin (as they are under the water), and has been raised to newness of life (as they come up out of the water).

Baptism is for anyone who has turned in faith to God and confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord – Forgiver and Leader of our lives – anyone who has received the Holy Spirit – and so been gifted by the Spirit and showing growing signs of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives – and anyone who is committed to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ in all aspects of their lives.

SLIDE 2. Why is Christian Baptism important?

MAIN COURSE

The expanded version of our *Confession of Faith* has a FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS section **for** this article of faith – 16 in all!

I won't go through all of them – but I'd like to highlight a # of them for this teaching time.

SLIDE 3. Why do we practice *believer's* baptism?

And by "believers" we mean – people old enough to believe in and follow Jesus.

We practice believers baptism for a # of reasons:

1. Because we believe it's a voluntary act – not something done for you, but a choice you make.
2. Because we believe that it is a choice to make – *post conversion* – after you have decided to place your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
3. Because we believe that it is the pattern of the bible – which we see – for example – in Mt. 3 - in John-the-Baptist's preparatory ministry – which we see in Acts 2 – when thousands of "God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven" (v. 5) were baptized – which we see – for example – in Acts 8 – when Phillip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch – all people who could responsibly confess their sin, turn to God for forgiveness, and commit their lives to Jesus and his way – none of which a child can do.

To this latter point – we don't believe that the NT texts support infant baptism.

I don't believe – for instance – that my baptism as a child in the Catholic Church saves me along with my family.

SLIDE 4. Does baptism save?

Nope! Jesus saves!

We believe that baptism is a public act of identification with the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We believe that it is a visible picture of an invisible reality: that baptism points to our salvation through faith in Jesus.

SLIDE 5. What is baptism?

Well – let me paraphrase some of the good work Pastor Darrel Schmidt did on this subject - for our *Baptism and Membership* class!

The Greek word for "baptism" is the word "baptizo" – which means "to dip or immerse or plunge" – which is a reason why we practice baptism by immersion @ SLC – another being that immersion seems to be the exclusive pattern of the bible.

The ancient Jews had several religious ceremonies that included washing in water. One of them was to baptize non-Jews in water when they joined the Jewish faith. Hmm.

John-the-Baptist (a Jew) introduced a new understanding of baptism by baptizing – not the outsiders – the non-Jews – but by baptizing the insiders – the Jews themselves – who saw themselves as chosen and righteous people – who – therefore – were perturbed by John's baptism.

Ouch!

This baptism – however - was meant to be a symbol of *inward* repentance – a turning of mind and heart toward God (Lk. 3:3).

Baptism then became a key Christian identifier and requirement for all Christians – reinterpreted by John, modelled by Jesus when John baptized him (Mt. 3:14-16), commanded by Christ in his commission to the church (Mt. 28:19), and then being the practice of the early church (Acts 2:41).

SLIDE 6. When should baptism occur?

Well – the pattern of the bible is that baptism is closely connected to conversion.

In other words – there's no need for a long delay between conversion and baptism.

And by "conversion" – we mean this – someone who wasn't a Christian who becomes a Christian – by agreeing and declaring – as the bible says - that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead (Ro. 10:9).

So that a Christian is someone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God - who died on the cross to forgive their sins - and rose from the dead to give them new life (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

So that a Christian is someone who says, "Jesus is Lord" and partners with the Holy Spirit within them to live like it – by word and deed.

Which is saying something – because – at the time of Christ – this was a political statement which could get you killed - in contrast to the declaration of the Roman Empire which was, "Caesar is Lord!"

So that a Christian is someone whose *primary* allegiance isn't to the ideologies or politics or values of the world – including being a Canucks fan:) - but to Jesus instead!

Baptism – then - belongs at the *beginning* of a disciple's journey – not at the end – for instance - as if it were some kind of graduation ceremony for the spiritually mature.

This said – we do believe it's useful for baptismal candidates to have a basic understanding of - *salvation* and *baptism* – and *discipleship* as part of their Christian life in a local church.

We think it's a good idea that candidates be familiar with the twin focus of baptism – such as it is - that it looks *backward* to their conversion and calling to follow Jesus (“Come, follow me!”) - AND - it looks *forward* to their life as a disciple - who makes disciples (“I will make you fishers of men!”).

Here @ SLC – we have tried to give people a basic understanding of *salvation* and *baptism* and *discipleship* by conducting *Baptism and Membership* classes – which include a look at our Mission, Vision and Values statements, our affiliations, how and why we do the ministries we do, a look at our Confession of Faith, our participation in the life and mission of the church, some preparatory work - for the day of baptism - on our conversion stories, and – of course – having lunch together:)

It is a pair of classes for anyone at anytime – who is a convert by faith and is seeking to obey the commandments of the bible.

But we might wonder, “How young is too young?” OR maybe even, “How old is too old?”

Keeping in mind that baptism is tied closely to conversion – timing-wise - we think its best for a baptismal candidate to be old enough to understand that in baptism they testify to *their* own repentance, confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior, and their subsequent commitment to live as a disciple of Jesus in a local church.

That’s a lot to ask of a kid!

So, it falls to the church to discern the genuineness of a child’s spiritual experience, their understanding of the basics, and whether they actually “own” their faith or if they’re getting baptized just to please parents or to join buddies taking the same step.

This was what we had to discern with our children.

Josh was 10 or 11 years old. Cailey was 8 or 9 years old. They both seemed to understand the basics of salvation and baptism and discipleship, their desire to be baptized seemed genuine to us, they were both baptized on their own, we didn’t want to quench the work of the Holy Spirit.

And they both wrote their own testimonies under our supervision – to make sure they understood what and why they were doing what they were doing – and – of course - to check for spelling and grammar mistakes :)

It seemed to us that they were responding to what they understood at the time.

So, we baptized them!

As children – some time apart from their conversion.

But close enough to mark the start of their journey as disciples of Jesus.

Can a person be too old for baptism?

No! It's never too late to be baptized.

You may have grown up in the church and never felt "called" to baptism, but you've known otherwise that it is a command to obey – not a suggestion to reject.

You may have grown up in the church and mistakenly told yourself that you had to observe some kind of spiritual probation to prove your faith to validate your baptism but understand now that it's actually the reverse: that sanctification – God working with us on us to transform us into the likeness of Jesus – follows baptism – it doesn't precede it.

You may have grown up in the church and known all these things and maybe you were too embarrassed to not have acted on them.

But let me tell you this: It is always good to obey the commands of the bible. It is always good to look back and see what God has done for you. It is always good to celebrate new life.

SLIDE 7. What if a person wants to be baptized but not become part of the local church?

Well – again – this doesn't seem to be the pattern in the bible – and so it has not been the practice of Anabaptist churches – like ours.

The argument seems to go something like this: Baptism in the NT world had strong associations with incorporation or inclusion into a group.

As I said earlier – paraphrasing Pastor Darrel – Gentiles who wanted to become converts to Judaism would be required to enter a pool of water - called a mikveh - and immerse themselves.

This being the context – many see Acts 2:41 as being much the same – where the newly converted were baptized and then "about three thousand were added to their number that day."

Here's my take.

We become members of the universal church the moment we accept Jesus Christ as the One who forgives our sin, and the One to whom we give our primary allegiance.

Paul says it this way – that we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13) – the church.

But – I would argue – that it is only the local church who can welcome a new believer, commit to support, and encourage, disciple and teach a new believer, and hold a new believer accountable.

Last question... This one is mine.

SLIDE 8. Does baptism need to be tied to membership?

I don't know.

On the one hand – it's clear that it does in the sense that I just talked about it.

On the other hand – I'm not sure it needs to be - in the context of how we think about and talk about church membership these days.

What if, for instance, I'd like to get baptized here @ SLC but I don't necessarily want to become a member? I like the people here. I feel welcome. I LOVE the Pastor! The ministries of the church have helped me in my discipleship. I have places to use my gifts. But I'm struggling with a part of the Confession of Faith.

Would we refuse to baptize that person – if they met all the "qualifications" we talked about earlier?

What if, for instance, I was born and bred into another faith tradition where I was baptized as a child – then confirmed my faith in Christ as a teen? I know my infant baptism doesn't fit the pattern of the bible, but I believe my confirmation acts as a kind of believer's baptism testimony. Do I need to get baptized?

Would we refuse to include them as members of the church?

What if, for instance, I was someone who's been @ SLC for quite a while. I am known by the church. I faithfully tithe. My spiritual gifts have been affirmed by the congregation. I am a trusted and maturing follower of Jesus Christ. But I'm not a member.

What ministries would we keep them from? Would there be exceptions to the rules?

And what does it mean when a non-member of the church is more committed to the church than a member of the church? And by committed, I mean – that they are here on Sundays more often than not, they are in a small group, they are using their gifts in service of the church, and they are loving and serving their community out there – including their neighbors.

And what does membership mean when we need to hold someone accountable if that membership is in name only vs. it being based on relationship and the ability to give and receive counsel?

I don't know.

This is why I'm in conversation with other Mennonite Brethren leaders on this subject.

And we'll sort these things together. For now – maybe we can agree to this...

TAKE OUT

SLIDE 9. Leader: Jesus our Lord was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. All who turn to Jesus are also called to pass through the waters and embark on a life of obedience and abundant joy.

SLIDE 10. Congregation: Blessed is the one who hears the call of Jesus and follows. Blessed is the one cleansed by Jesus' forgiving love, washed and made new by the Holy Spirit, welcomed into the Father's family.

SLIDE 11. Leader: Baptism is a public testimony of repentance and the forgiveness of sin.

SLIDE 12. Congregation: Baptism testifies that we have died with Christ, that we might also be raised in newness of life in Him.

SLIDE 13. Leader: Baptism is a pledge to serve Christ according to the gifts God has given.

SLIDE 14. Congregation: Baptism announces that we belong to God: we take God's name upon ourselves, and God's people become our people.

SLIDE 15. Leader: So submit yourselves to God, and commit yourselves to the church family that God has entrusted to your care.