

“The Gift of Baptism”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, and welcome to Pleasant Corners UMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is a joy to be here in celebration with you. Baptism is a special thing. For two thousand years Christians have been Baptizing each other as adults and as children. It marks for us the entry into God’s kingdom. We also recognize it as the entry point into our church, into our community of Christians. Many of the other important things that we do as Christians here at Pleasant Corners harkens back to our individual Baptisms, and we often mention it. Confirmation mentions Baptism, Communion as the other sacrament is connected with Baptism, and our affirmations as a church start with our individual Baptisms. Today we got to witness and be a part of Bree and Charlie’s entries into God’s kingdom. Of course the act of splashing water on a child is not what guarantees salvation, but it is a significant step in that direction. Because Baptism is so connected with all things Christian we should remember this day for them as more than just a formality, it is a gift for them and us.

If you have ever heard of the Great Commission before, then the command to Baptize should sound familiar. The last thing that Jesus shares with His disciples, the last command that He gives them before He ascends into heaven, is this: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” That comes from Matthew 28:19-20, and it should stick out to us. You four parents who are here with us this morning, you have a job to do with your little

ones in your arms. You are called by Christ Himself to Baptize them, which you have now done. But the bigger command, the one that the Baptism symbolizes and the one that you affirmed here today, is that you are to teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded us. Basically, you are called to raise your children in the church, teaching them about their Savior. What you do will lay the foundation for the rest of their lives, and however you act will significantly affect their behavior. If you care about Christ, they will care about Christ. If you go to church, they will go to church. If you pray, they will pray. So on and so forth. To be a parent is a hard but rewarding task, and just as you will raise these two beautiful baby girls to value what you value, you should raise them to value their faith in Christ. If that sounds daunting and scary, the good news is that you do not do it alone. Beloved Congregation, family, and friends, you too are called to nurture these little ones. You too play a huge role. What grandma and grandpa does matters. The love and respect and care shown by the church matters. The things you do around these little ones matters, and we should not take it for granted. Baptism is a gift, because it marks the first steps along the road. It is the first steps that these young girls have taken in what will end up being an eternal journey with Christ.

Speaking of Jesus, He too was Baptized just as most, if not all, of us were. In our reading from Matthew three we read about how He came and was Baptized by John the Baptist. The message of Baptism preached by John is one that you hear in your churches even today. In Matthew 3:2-3 we read "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'" John the Baptist was a strange cat to much of the world. He didn't look like everyone else, and he certainly didn't

preach like everyone else. His concern was not with the stuff of this world but instead was focused on a repentant life... and on preparing people for the coming of Jesus. His Baptism was a commitment that people would make in the presence of their peers as a physical representation of that repentance from sins that they were agreeing to. The Pharisees and Sadducees were warned that they shouldn't expect grace from the Lord just because they were children of Abraham. Being born a Jew, John the Baptist asserted, was not what granted a person favor from the Lord. Additionally today we should recognize that being a church member, being a "good person" in society's eyes, or even calling ourselves Christians isn't enough. What brings about salvation is our adherence to Christ. He pays for our salvation, we don't earn it and it isn't by our own actions that we are brought to heaven... it comes from Him. This includes Baptism alone. The act of pouring water on their foreheads and me making a cross is not what is going to bring them salvation. That comes from a personal relationship with their Creator. For our two little ones here, Bree and Charlie, we should recognize that this is not the only thing that they need in this life. As they grow they too will need to live a life that is centered around Jesus, one that is repentant. By that we mean that they will have to recognize that they are sinners like all the rest of humankind, and just like all the rest of us that they need a Savior. That Savior, of course, is Jesus, who paid the price for all of our sins upon the cross. In Baptizing these children now we, as the adults, as the their guardians, as their church mates, as their teachers, as their family, are affirming that we will lay the foundation in their faith lives so that they will grow up knowing that the Lord loves them and has redeemed them, so that they may then live a repentant lifestyle.

Here in the United Methodist Church we will reaffirm this with them when they are able to take the stand in their faith on their own as early teenagers through the act of Confirmation. The vows all of us just took on their behalf will be stated again... by Charlie and Bree when they are old enough to affirm them. This is what we mean when we talk about Baptism being the beginning of their faith. It isn't the end all be all, but it is the start. Baptism also marks something else that is very important, namely it marks their entrance into the faith community. All of us, or at least certainly most of us, who call upon Christ have entered the water to be Baptized. Whether as children or as adults, we have been dedicated to the Lord and have moved symbolically from outside of God's kingdom and outside of God's church to now being inside of it. It is a gift to be a part of God's kingdom and a part of His church through the sacrament of Baptism, but we should always remember that there is more to come.

In our reading for this morning John the Baptist baptizes Jesus. "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him, and John tried to prevent Him, saying 'I need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" The Baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His ministry. From this point Jesus will go and do all of the things that we know our Savior does. All of His teachings that we read, all of the miracles that He performs, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension all come after this point.

In the great story of our Savior, this is the point where He then takes center stage. For Bree and Charlie, they may not be fully aware about what is happening now, but someday they will. They will know that they were dedicated to the Lord from a young age by their parents, by their friends, and by their church. Jesus obviously went on to do great things following His Baptism in the name of the Lord, we certainly pray that the same would be true for these little ones as well. That they would follow Christ just as two thousand years worth of their brothers and sisters have before them.

There is one final section of scripture that we read this morning that we have to look at before we close the sermon. In Matthew 19:13-14 we read “Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’” Jesus made time for the little ones. He prayed for them, He cared for them, and He made it well known that heaven was open to them. As we close here today we should really remember that Baptism is a gift Beloved Congregation. It not only marks the entrance of Charlie and Bree into the church, it not only marks the beginning of their Christian journey, but it also marks them as Jesus’s own. The same Creator in whose name we Baptized your children this morning is the same one who loved them enough to die for them upon the cross, and is the same Creator who was powerful enough to rise up out of the grave on Easter morning. That God, the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Lord, is the same one who said that heaven belongs to children just like yours. What a gift. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer