

Getting to Know Jesus- Adult Bible Discovery Guide- *March 15, 2020*

Welcome to Adult Bible Study this morning. Today we will consider the wonderful gift of Baptism. We will do some reading and then dig into scripture and have some conversation. This study has been crafted for you to do individually or in a small group.

Opening Prayer: *Heavenly Father, You have forgiven our sins, rescued us from death and the devil, and given us eternal life by Baptism into the death and resurrection of Your beloved Son. Strengthen our faith so that we daily put to death all sins and evil desires and, trusting Your sure promises, are raised to live before You in righteousness and purity. Finally, bring to us the fulfillment of our Baptism in the resurrection of the body to life everlasting' through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen!*

Questions to ponder as you begin.

- When and where were you baptized?
- Who were your sponsors or Godparents?
- Do you have any physical reminders of that day? What are they? Where are they?
- Why is it important to remember our baptisms?

Read selections from *Getting to Know Jesus* (p.p. 102-106) *Scanned below

- What stood out to you in the reading?
- What questions do you still have about Baptism after reading this section?

Read Matthew 3:13-17

- Baptism was a common religious ritual. A ceremonial washing was a physical action that reminded people of their need to be spiritually cleansed and for their sins to be washed away. Why do you think this ceremony was helpful to people?
- Why do you think Jesus was baptized?
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "To fulfill all righteousness"?

Read Matthew 28:16-20

- Verse 17 says some of the disciples doubted. What do you think they doubted? Why did they doubt?
- Why do you think Jesus tells his disciples to make more disciples by baptizing and teaching?
- Why is it important that Jesus specifically identifies how the disciples should be baptized (in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit)?

Read Roman 6:1-7

- What do you think it means to be baptized into the death and the resurrection of Jesus?
- What does it mean to be united with Jesus?

Wrapping it up

- Think of some common "physical markings" (cross on the wall, graphic t-shirt, tattoo, etc.) that people use to convey what is important to them. Why are these helpful?
- Martin Luther said that every morning when you wash your face you should remember your baptism. How can remembering and celebrating your baptism be helpful in your life of faith?

Personal Reflection

Read the following passages several times over and reflect on the words. Consider what God is saying to you through them. Write down a few notes about your thoughts in regards to these words.

- Romans 6:3-5
- Acts 2:37-39
- Titus 3:4-7

Baptism is a sacrament

A sacrament is simply defined as a sacred act. But in most churches, it also refers to specific ceremonies. In the Lutheran Church, a sacrament is defined by three things:

1. Commanded and instituted by Jesus
2. Combines the Word of God with a physical element
3. Imparts the forgiveness of sins

One of the reasons a sacrament is such a blessing is the connection between something intangible and invisible to something tangible. In baptism, God connects faith and forgiveness to water and the Word of God.

Quite often people misunderstand God's primary intention in baptism. It is not an arbitrary ceremony that God demands of us because he likes to impose obligations on people. God gives us baptism as a gift, a means through which he gives his saving grace to us. We receive faith in Jesus, complete forgiveness, the guarantee of heaven, and a physical verification of his great love and commitment to us! God gives baptism to bless us! He knows that we are physical beings who have a strong dependence on physical affirmation. When things are more concrete our hearts rest easy. For example, if you buy a house from someone, it is exciting to reach a verbal agreement and shake hands on a deal. But having the title to the property in your hands brings even more assurance that it really does belong to you.

The same is true for saving faith. It's great to know that Jesus died for your sins, forgives you and loves you unconditionally. But it sure helps to know that through baptism those promises are assured. And that's what baptism does! Through water and the Word of God, the Holy Spirit acts, sins are forgiven, and faith is imparted. Ultimately, our hope is in Jesus Christ our Savior, not in the act of baptism. But God gives us the gift of baptism to create, strengthen and deepen our connection to Jesus.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites had a ritual called ceremonial washing. It was a physical reminder of a spiritual reality—a person is made unclean with sin. Sin needs to be washed away so a person can enter the presence of God. Martin Luther once said that every morning when you wash your face, remember your baptism, that your sins have been washed away.

Baptismal assurance

In the Bible, St. Paul wrote in Romans 6 that we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through baptism we are connected to the redeeming work of Jesus. His crucifixion satisfies God's demands of justice for us. His resurrection gives us victory over death. Through baptism our sins are washed away and we are new creations in Jesus.

In any relationship there are good days and bad days. When you fight or argue with someone you love, it's hard not to have doubts about the relationship. You worry if the person you love will stop loving you. What if my friend, spouse, or child walks away from me? The fear of a broken relationship can be devastating. It's no way to live! That is the last thing God wants. As a Christian, you will have bad days when sin gets the best of you. You might have a bad week, month, or year! But God never wants you to doubt his love for you. He doesn't want sin to rule over you, nor does he want you to fall into despair. He wants you to live in his grace—repentant of your sins, and grateful for his grace.

Infant Baptism

Probably the most visible difference between certain Christian denominations is their practice regarding infant baptism. Some churches baptize infants; others do not. Which one is right? If both sides of this issue were honest, they would admit it is a challenging question. Nowhere in the Bible does it explicitly say to "baptize infants." And nowhere in the Bible does it say "don't baptize infants." If the Bible doesn't say specifically one

way or the other, how do we know what to do? The answer is: you reach a conclusion based on the best information the Bible offers.

Here's the simplest guideline I can offer: Most churches that believe in "decision theology" (remember Chapter 5?) don't practice infant baptism. They believe that faith comes through intellectual comprehension of the gospel and a free will decision to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Baptism follows that decision as a public witness of faith. There are two teachings that are closely associated with this view of baptism. First, it is connected with the teaching called "once saved, always saved." In other words, once a person makes a genuine and sincere decision to be a Christian, they cannot fall away from that faith. And secondly, it is connected with the teaching called "the age of accountability." In other words, a child is not held accountable for his sins until he reaches an age where he can understand the concept of sin. Although that age varies for individuals, it is generally considered to be around the age of twelve.

Churches that believe in no free will, or limited free will, tend to practice infant baptism. If you remember the chapter on the Holy Spirit, Martin Luther explained, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him." Since reason and free will are not a part of coming to faith, baptism is a miraculous way of imparting saving faith to those who are not old enough to process the gospel intellectually. Hearing the gospel and having the Holy Spirit work through your intellect is certainly one way of coming to saving faith. But it is still the power of the Holy Spirit overpowering a person's will, not a person's free will. Churches that practice infant baptism have two closely connected teachings and practices. First, these churches often hold that the Bible teaches a person can fall away from their faith. A person can reject God and his grace. Second, these churches usually have a practice called "confirmation." At an age when children can more fully learn the fundamental teachings of Christianity, they are taught. At the end of the instruction, they are offered the opportunity to confirm the faith they received in baptism—and to pledge their faithfulness in following Jesus.

The challenge

At the end of the line, both sides of this issue have a challenging question to answer about the origin of faith. Those who hold to the teaching of total free will—decision theology—will be challenged if a person who was once a Christian completely rejects Jesus. The explanation offered is that their "conversion" was not genuine and sincere in the first place. In other words, they were never truly converted. The challenge in that answer is the constant uncertainty of a person wondering if their conversion was genuine. This is particularly difficult when struggling with a particular sin. A person begins to wonder, "If I really love Jesus, why do I struggle with this particular sin? Maybe I need to be converted again." That focus constantly leads a person to look inward, which is a very hopeless exercise, because every person is filled with sin. And that mindset can lead to many conversion experiences, because hope can only rest on your own genuineness. The second challenge is defending the teaching of "the age of accountability" from the Bible. The Bible does not have much to say about God not holding children accountable for sin. In fact, it says quite the opposite! Consider these Scripture passages:

"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5)

"Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies." (Psalm 58:3)

Those churches that practice infant baptism have some challenging questions as well. First of all, if an infant is baptized, at what point is saving faith lost as a child matures? What if that baptismal faith is not nurtured? What happens if that child is not instructed about the Savior's love? When does that baptismal faith no longer save because there is no knowledge of the gospel? Those are tough questions! It is vitally important for parents to continually give their children the admonition of the law and the nurture of the gospel in order for baptismal faith to be kept alive (Proverbs 22:6). Spirit-created faith must also be Spirit-fed in order to survive and thrive!

Another challenging question is what happens to an infant who dies before being baptized? The answer to that question is: God's grace is not limited by baptism. We don't have a clear answer to all of the questions about baptism, but we do have clear answers about God's grace and mercy.

Mystery

Finally, every Christian must admit that there is a mystery that can only be known by God. The great mystery of the cross is, "Why are some saved and others not?" Quite simply, that question is the theological end of the road. We cannot know the mind of God, but we can know the heart of God. Finally, Christianity is based on faith and trust, not logic and reason. Don't get me wrong, the Bible is very logical, and reason is a gift of God that Christians should embrace. But the life of a Christian is a lot like a child who simply cannot understand what his parents do. At some point a child must trust that his parents love him and have his best interests at heart.

Relationships are the essence of life. They are a journey, an adventure; they are new and fresh every day. Relationships are not just a part of life; they are life. It begins with living in relationship with God—your Creator and Redeemer. And it flows over into the relationships with your neighbors and friends. It is God's great desire that you have great confidence in him! His love is perfect. He will never leave you or abandon you. The greatest fears you have in human relationships can never be realized in your relationship with God. Knowing that you are secure in his love gives you the strength to step out and take the risk of loving others the way he loves you.

Baptism is a great gift from God to assure you of his love. Don't overthink it! Don't get trapped in trying to figure out the mystery of it, or the unknowns. Take it for what God intended it to be: a clear, tangible means of receiving his grace.