

GOD RECYCLES

Romans 3:21-24; 1 Corinthians 1:27-30

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PROLOGUE

The reformer Martin Luther found both strength and courage to face the difficulties of life by remembering his baptism. More and more churches today are providing ways for Christians to remember their baptism. In recent years we have set aside this Sunday, also known as “Baptism of the Lord Sunday,” as a time to remember the meaning of our own baptism. Among other things, baptism represents a new beginning, a fresh start.

SCRIPTURE

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, {22} the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, {23} since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; {24} they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:21-24 NRSV).

MESSAGE: PART ONE

The word “baptize” is taken from an ancient Greek word that originally meant “to immerse.” If you took a rock and placed it under water you could say you baptized the rock. Over time, the word baptize came to be associated with water itself, since water was usually involved when something was immersed. When ancient Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek they used the word baptize to mean cleansing with water. The early Christians adopted the word baptize and also added a new word “baptism” which was the experience of being baptized. They associated it not only with cleansing but also the death and resurrection of Christ and the act of joining the church.

At first it may seem odd that these three ideas: forgiveness of sins, death and resurrection, and joining the church, are all connected with baptism. But each one conveys the sense of newness. If you are forgiven then you have a fresh start. If you are resurrected you have a new life. If you join the church you have a new family. Baptism is associated with a new beginning.

The Bible tells us again and again that reason we can have a new beginning is because of Jesus Christ. God sent him into our world to be our redeemer. Unfortunately, this word “redeemer” is often misunderstood today. In modern terms, a redeemer is someone who returns an empty beverage container in order to receive a refund. In other words, an item that is regarded as having value is handed over in order to receive money. But 2,000

years ago it was just the opposite. A redeemer paid a price in order to claim something or someone regarded as valuable. Jesus regarded us to be of great value to him and so he paid a great price in order to claim us, that is, in order to redeem us. To put it still another way, because of Jesus we know God recycles!

[video clip “God Recycles”]

RENEWAL OF BAPTISM

Call to Renewal

God recycles. The baptismal is his recycling bin. By the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ we can receive the benefits of God’s promises. We can have a fresh start. Our friendship with God can be restored. We can be assured we are included in the family of God. Remembering your baptism provides an opportunity for all of this and more.

All of you who have been claimed by Christ in baptism are invited to renew the meaning of your baptism this day. If you trust in Jesus Christ but have never been baptized, you may also participate but are urged to present yourself at a later date for baptism. And whether or not you have ever been baptized with water, if you are not sure if you have ever received Christ then why not use this opportunity today to be sure.

The Psalmist declared:

The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is full of majesty (Psalm 29:3-4).

Profession of Faith

Do you believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

I DO.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord?

I DO.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the church, in the resurrection, and in the life eternal?

I DO.

Will you seek to live out your baptism by turning from sin and turning to righteousness?

I WILL.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers?

I WILL.

Will you give witness to the Gospel of salvation through faith in Christ and will you strive

for peace and justice in our world?

I WILL.

Prayer concluding with Lord's Prayer

Heavenly Father, for those of us who have been claimed through the waters we ask that you renew within us the covenant you made with us in baptism. For those of us who have come to trust in you but have not been baptized, make us uncomfortable until such time as we are willing to surrender to you in this way. And for those for whom this whole thing seems brand new, each one can pray: Thank you, Lord Jesus for your great love in dying for me. I open the door of my heart and soul. Come in, Lord Jesus. Come in as my Savior and cleanse me: Come in as my Lord and lead me.

And for all of us, O God, we pray that you fill us with the power of your Holy Spirit. Send us into our daily tasks to be witnesses to your love. Empower us to strive for peace and justice in all the earth. Enable us to serve you with joy, and bring us at last to your kingdom beyond the final river. And so we pray, as disciples have been taught to pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Invitation

You are invited to come forward, dip your fingers in the water of the baptismal and bring it up to your forehead. Touching the water is not in any way a repetition of baptism. Nor does it imply that the water itself bears any spiritual power. Rather, it is a reminder—a tangible, physical symbol—of the event that is at the root and foundation of the Christian life. As you return to your seats, claim a Ziploc® bag with coffee beans, but do not open until instructed to do so. If you have difficulty walking you may have someone else claim a bag for you or we can make sure you receive one at the conclusion of the service.

SCRIPTURE

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; {28} God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, {29} so that no one might boast in the presence of God. {30} He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:27-30 NRSV).

MESSAGE: PART TWO:

Go ahead and open your bag. Coffee beans! Take a coffee bean out and smell it. Any

coffee connoisseurs here? Feel free to put it in your mouth and taste it. You can do whatever you want with it, but what you have in your hand is absolutely the most expensive coffee bean in the world.

[Pause to allow people to examine the coffee beans, then continue:]

This type of coffee is extremely rare. It comes from only one part of the planet, a part of the world known for its great coffee, Indonesia. Some coffee connoisseurs consider this the most exquisite, exotic, complex-tasting coffee in the world. Let me ask coffee lovers: How much does a pound of really great roasted coffee beans cost? (Wait for answers.) Well, this stuff costs \$300 or more a pound! This coffee is so expensive that it's sold by the ounce- the only coffee that's sold in such a small increment. That's what you have in your hand. It is called Kopi Luwak.

This coffee has a very interesting story. Kopi is an Indonesian word for coffee. A luwak is a jungle cat. It's about the size of a fox and is active only at night. The luwak has one very unusual habit. In fact, this cat is the Juan Valdez of the animal kingdom. It picks only the ripest, reddest coffee cherries and eats them. After eating them, the cat digests them. The coffee bean actually emerges from the digestive process fairly intact. The enzymes in the animal's stomach apparently add something unique to the beans flavor, and growers have learned to harvest these beans for their unique, rich flavor. So the coffee bean you're holding in your hand has been harvested from...well, you get the picture!

[Wait for responses.]

Every single one of the beans you're holding has passed through the digestive tract of an Indonesian wildcat. These beans in their pure form cost more than \$300 a pound. So what's the point? I suppose we could say, with God a lot of good things come out of unlikely places! But what does this have to do with baptism?

In recent years we have used a number of different tokens to remind us of the meaning of our baptism – clam shells and smooth stones, Spirit doves and anchor crosses, to name a few. I keep them on top of my dresser so that I see them every morning before I go out into the world. But for me, the token with the deepest and most meaningful symbolism will be this packet of Kopi Luwak coffee beans.

God recycles. No matter what we've done, what "manure" we've been in, God can redeem us and make us an invaluable part of his plan.