

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST | JUNE 19, 2022

ISAIAH 65:1-9 | PSALM 22:19-28 | GALATIANS 3:23-29 | LUKE 8:26-39

This is for Matt and Alyssa. But if the rest of you want to stay and hang out, that's fine.

Matt and Alyssa, you are being confirmed today. This is very exciting. And there's just one small problem. If you open up our *ELW*, you'll notice that it has orders of service for funerals, marriages, confession, healing, and the daily offices. There is no service for confirmation.

That's because the rite that we'll use is actually called "Affirmation of Baptism." It just so happens that today's reading from Galatians is all about baptism, and it gives all of us a helpful way to understand exactly what it is that we're doing today.

This letter was written by St. Paul to the church in Galatia. This community was running into a problem. The early church, which started as a Jewish community, was trying to figure out whether to allow Gentiles, non-Jews, into the community. And eventually they decide that they will. But as soon as they solved that problem, they stumbled into a new one. If Gentiles are going to become part of this community, how is that going to happen?

The answer that the church in Galatia came up with is that Gentiles who want to join have to come in through Judaism. They have to keep the law. And once you take that first step, then you can take the second step into the church.

St. Paul has a different answer. Gentiles can become part of this community, but they're not going to do it by adhering to the law. They're going to do it through their baptisms. And along the way, Paul gives the Galatians and all of us a really nice breakdown of what baptism does.

First, baptism unites us with Jesus. St. Paul writes that you were baptized "into Christ." This is just another way of saying you your life and Jesus's life have been bound together. That Jesus took on our life, living among us, dealing with the hopes and joys and perils of existence. And Jesus took on our own life even to the point of death. So there is no experience of life that you will ever have that God has not experienced already.

And Jesus takes on our life so that we can take on his life. So that the Jesus's righteousness, his relationship with God and others, is now given to us. Luther used to call this the "glorious exchange." That when we are baptized into Christ, everything that is ours becomes Christ's, and everything that is Christ's becomes ours. Life may be full of challenges and struggles and obstacles. But Jesus goes through it with us. God never promises us that that life will be easy, only that we'll never live it alone.

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Second, baptism is a gift. Baptism is not a ritual that the bishop or I came up with on our own. Baptism is something God created for our sake. As you remember from confirmation class, for something to be a sacrament, it has to have a promise, a tangible sign, and something instituted by Jesus. Something Jesus tells us to do. Something that has been given or gifted to us. God doesn't need baptism. But we do. And so God meets us where we are to bring us to faith.

But baptism is a gift in another, probably more important way, too. Because it's in our baptisms that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Of course, the Holy Spirit works in our lives before we're baptized, but in our baptisms God pours out the love of Christ and seals it forever on our lives, helping us grow in faith and hope and love together. That isn't our own creation, but the grace of God overflowing into our lives.

And third, baptism creates a new social reality in the world. Today's reading contains a line that probably came from an early baptismal liturgy. St. Paul writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Those three distinctions were some of the most important in the Roman Empire. And they were not simply distinctions but hierarchies loaded up with power. Within this community in Galatia, it was thought better to be a Jew than a Gentile, better to be free than enslaved, better to be male than female.

But the baptized community is organized differently. It doesn't have degrees of membership. It doesn't have premium baptism for the men and budget baptism package for the women. It doesn't have lavish communion meals for the rich and PB+J communion for the poor. There are no distinctions drawn within this community's liturgical praxis. That doesn't mean our identities, your own identities, don't matter. But it means that they never make you superior or inferior to anyone else. There are no right kinds of people or wrong kinds of people in the body of Christ, only baptized people.

So what exactly are we doing here today? Well, you are both affirming your baptisms. You are proclaiming publicly your intent to live among God's faithful people, hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, proclaim the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

The irony of you affirming your baptisms is that, to some extent, it really doesn't matter. Because all the stuff that baptism does will be true anyway. You will still be united with Jesus. You will still have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. God will have still torn down the barriers that we build between one another. Whether you affirm it or not, God is going to keep on creating and renewing and redeeming our creation.

But in another way, your affirmation of your baptism makes all the difference in the world. To this community. To your neighbors. And to all the people of God. Because you are recommitting yourself, and this community is recommitting to supporting you, in following the move of God out in the world.

Your job, your responsibility, is not to go out and save the world. It's to help the world become what God has already made it through the resurrection of Jesus. Redeemed. Peaceful. Whole.

Our community, our church, and our world have no shortage of problems to fix. But you have all you need to be successful. And truth be told, you got everything you needed for the job ahead the day you were baptized.

So today, Alyssa and Matt, we give thanks for your witness in this community. And we look forward to seeing all that God continues to do through your lives.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor