

## Saved through Washing

“Believe there is good in the world.” I recently saw someone share a picture of a mural with this phrase. It’s a nice little sentiment. The idea is that somewhere out there, you have to find good in the world. And there is, no doubt about it. We hear these wonderful feel good stories that warm our hearts, make you stop and think, “Wow, that’s so nice.” She goes above and beyond. Or, she just did what you expect and it’s good. Believe there is good in the world! It’s a nice sentiment. If you look hard enough and open your eyes, you can see it.

But why do we need the reminder? Why the insistence to believe? Because we see so much of that opposite that leave us thinking, how could someone do that to another human being? How could she act like that? Why would he say something like that? At times, it can be hard to believe that there is good out there because that’s not what we see! The simple fact is, we are physical human beings who put more stock in what our own two eyeballs actually see rather than what we are told. We need to see the numbers. We need to see the facts. “I’ll believe it, when I see it!” you probably have even said.

So then you see the baptismal font. You see a baptism happen. But what do you see? You see a crying baby with a nervous mom and dad hoping that she doesn’t make too much of a scene. You see a pastor make the sign of a cross. Water—regular high quality H<sub>2</sub>O—pours onto her head. And that’s it. You can see why some teach that this is just a nice ceremony that just symbolizes a washing away of sin, look at it. It’s a nice picture. You can see why people say you should let a child grow up to decide for themselves if they want this, looks like a mere dedication with mom and dad. You can see why others teach it’s a nice start, but she has a lot to work on before she is saved. After all, you see a crying baby go up and watch a crying baby return all in a matter of a few minutes. It doesn’t look like much has happened up there at all. And, yet, this is what God says in Titus 3:4-7:

**<sup>4</sup>But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.**

Paul is writing to Pastor Titus who he left to organize the church on the island of Crete. Paul doesn’t give any nice sentiments about the world and looking for good. It’s quite the opposite. Paul sees foolish people who don’t know what they are doing. He sees disobedience to the government and to God’s will. He sees people

who lie to themselves while being duped by lies of other people. They are enslaved by passions and pleasures filled with all sorts of malice, envy and jealousy. They are hated and hating one another (Titus 3:3). That's what Paul sees. But, Paul isn't just saying this is them "out there" in the world. Paul says, at one time WE were like this too. We, including himself, were just like them. And amidst all of this hatred and self-loving and self-serving, God our Savior acts. He appears. He saves. Not because of any righteous, morally good things we had done. And thank the Lord this is most certainly true. We all know that we could do better. We readily admit we need to do better. For every good, kind thing we have done that is commendable and good in other people's eyes, we have a mountain of bad that we have done or, just as damning, considered doing. Even those good things without faith before God are like filthy, bloody rags, not helping our case in a shape or form. No, it was not us having done or having the capability to do good in the future that God saved us. It was because of his mercy—that is he does not treat us as we deserve. He had every right to treat us differently. Instead, he chooses to love us, to give us mercy and to save.

And how does he do this? Through washing; that is, through the visible water and spoken Word in Baptism. This washing works a rebirth and the Holy Spirit works a renewal. We who were born dead in sin, slaves to its desires, haters of God, and enemies of him, through this washing have been born again children of God and loved by him. Sin's stain along with its guilt and shame have been washed away. In its place Jesus clothes you in his perfection and makes you a new creation. We were snatched from the grips of Satan and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit God declares you His child. This means, as I had the name Flitter put on me at my birth that means I am part of the family Flitter, you have God's name placed on you at your rebirth in Baptism; therefore, you part of God's family. Jesus is your brother who is not ashamed of you. How could he be? Your sins have been washed away so God no longer remembers them! You are heir of God's fortune and everything is working out for your good. Already then, at your baptism, salvation and eternal life after this world are in your possession along with God's promise to work through Word and Sacrament to keep you in the one true faith until that life you hope for becomes your reality. That's what God promises you through the washing of water and the Word in baptism. And God does not lie.

But we don't always see that, do we. Too often how we live, act, and speak might surprise someone to hear that we claim to be Christian. Too often how we think about other people might surprise ourselves that we claim to be Christian. Foolishly we do things because we didn't know any better. Plenty of other things

we do even though we do know better. And then we do them again. We shackle ourselves chasing after the pleasures and passions of this world simply because it makes us feel good or help us to escape from the monotony of life. We listen to the devil's lies that it isn't that bad or it could be worse. We too easily cave to the pressures of others while getting pulled down by those who couldn't care less. We can be so malicious and cruel towards people who think or live differently than us. Envy over what someone else receives rears its ugly head especially when we don't feel like they worked enough for it. There's so much division and mutual disgust. Rebirth and renewal? More like wore out, tired, and grumpy. That's what we see.

It didn't look like much at Jesus' baptism either. There isn't a great procession that goes ahead of him. The angels make an appearance to sing from the heavens. Shoot, Jesus doesn't even have any family there for a reception after it all. Luke is kind of nonchalant about it. When other people were being baptized, Jesus did too. To anyone else who is there that day, all they see is another human being coming to John to be baptized. But look again. That's Jesus. That's true God from eternity, Jesus, who is there in perfect submission to his Father's will, to fulfill all righteousness. There he is in the place of the foolish and disobedient, the pleasure seekers and selfish pride holders. He stands with in the place of cheaters, liars, the envious, the doubters already carrying our sins for us to be washed with water and Word. Not that he himself needs to be saved, but because you did.

And then it happens. While he prays, God the Holy Spirit lowers himself in the form of a lowly dove to set Jesus aside for the work he was born to do. God the Father from eternity rips through time and space and speaks, **"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

How comforting and assuring this must have been for our Savior as he faced rejection in this world. They could reject him all they want, but his heavenly Father loves him and is well-pleased; therefore, he trusts this is all he needs. Even when his Father turns his back on him on that cross and Jesus is crushed under God's righteous judgment for our sins, Jesus still has this promise sealed to him in his baptism. He is doing his Father's will and He is well-pleased. And Jesus does it all for you trusting God will accept his work and in three days he will be raised to life again. As Jesus faces the pull of temptation Jesus is not fighting this on his own in his human nature. He's anointed with the Holy Spirit who gives him the power to resist sin and the devil! In his human nature Jesus is given the strength to carry out his work as he preaches and teaches the Good News. He's given the power to be our substitute. He's given the strength to die for his people to save them. No, Jesus' baptism wasn't just him doing the right thing or following some decree. He

wasn't simply dedicating his life to God's work. This wasn't just a symbol or neat picture. Jesus actually receives something at his baptism!

And because he does, that means you do too. To our human eyes we don't see very much at baptism. But look again. There at those waters with the spoken Word of God, your heavenly Father rips through time and space to speak through a pastor, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit you are my son, you are my daughter, whom I love, with you I am well-pleased because of Jesus' perfect life, death, and rising again." And nothing in all of creation can separate you from that love. Though we may feel otherwise, the Father isn't interested in your opinion or thought on the matter. From that day forward your heavenly Father loves you. This is the Word of the Lord and he does not lie. He pours out the Holy Spirit generously not only to wash your sins away but to empower you to live in Christ in righteousness, to say no to sin and yes to godly-living. He not only frees you from the devil's grip he empowers you to resist the devil and flee from him.

When you feel as if sin controls you, God gives you something sure to see, "But I am baptized, sin has no power over me. I have been reborn and renewed." When Satan's lies pour into your ears and his accusations haunt you, "Don't you see, Satan, I am baptized. My sins have been washed away. I'm already not guilty in God's sight. I'm justified by his grace." When the grave and death frightens you, "But I am baptized. I've already tasted death and was raised to life in those waters with Jesus. I have the sure hope and promise of eternal life." When the waves of life's storms are tossing and overwhelming, "But I am baptized. I've already been drowned in the waters of baptism and now live. I am God's child. He loves me. He will take care of me. He's got this." Daily go back to those waters of baptism, drown that old sinful flesh when you confess your sins and daily you rise again a new creation with sins forgiven because, "I am baptized." How easily and quickly few forget these truths. That's why it's important for to not stop learning all of God's teaching. To say that Baptism is just a symbol, a dedication, to say that it does not save is diabolical and from the devil himself. It is robbing you of God's promises and his gift that you can see. You might not remember it. The truth remains the same. It does not grow old. The affects do not wear off. I am baptized—currently, right now, that's who I am. Baptism is not about us doing something. It is the triune God's kindness and love who saves you because of his mercy. He saved you through washing of water and the Word. And God does not lie. Amen.