

“Who ARE You?”

Acts 2:38-44 • Romans 6:3-11

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 11, 2015

Who are you? Think about that for a moment. What is it that defines who you are. Obviously your family is a big part of who you are. Where you grew up or where went to school can be major influences on your identity. Many people get their identity from their job. Men are especially bad about this. When we meet another man one of the first questions is, “what kind of work do you do?” That’s another way of asking, “who are you?”

While all of those can have an impact on us, none of them can truly tell us who we are. If you are a follower of the Lord Jesus, your identity does not come from your job or your family or your school. You are not defined by how much money you have or don’t have, by what kind of car you drive, you are not defined by some disease you have, by your political party, or by the color of your skin. Your true identity comes from Christ himself. And the sign of that identity is baptism.

Baptism is one of the two sacraments recognized by every Christian church. The other is Communion or the Lord’s Supper, which Brian talked about last week. A sacrament is something that, as the name says, is sacred. That’s because the basis for the sacraments is God himself. Sacraments were instituted by Jesus and he commands that all of his followers participate in them. Today we participate in both of them. But if we’re going to get the most out of participating in the sacraments, we really should know what they mean.

A sacrament is like a sign. It points beyond itself to some reality. A sign by itself is meaningless. A STOP sign by itself is just a red sign with a word on it. But when that same sign is put up at an intersection it points beyond itself to the reality that you must stop at that intersection or there will be consequences. Sacraments work the same way. You could say that sacraments are an outward sign of an inward transformation. Baptism is a sign that

visibly points us to the reality of what God is doing. The inward transformation is that we are regenerated, purified and renewed by the Holy Spirit. In baptism we are given new life. But we can’t see that happening. So God gave us the sign of baptism to remind us of what He’s doing. Just as water washes away dirt and also cools and refreshes our bodies when we’re hot and tired, the grace of God does the same thing for our souls. The outward sign of the water assures us of God’s gift of grace and forgiveness.

It seems to me that in the Bible baptism is the sign of five things. The first and most obvious is that baptism is a sign of membership in the church – not just the local church but the universal Church. It’s the sign that you are now part of a fellowship of believers. For you to be baptized into Christ’s church and then not participate in His church is to deny your true identity. Our passage from Acts 2 tells us, “They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Those are things that followers of Jesus *want* to do all the time. They want to study the Bible, spend time with other Christians, pray and worship. When you are baptized you become part of a family of faith.

That brings us to the second point, baptism is a sign of your adoption into the God’s family. Romans 8 says, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of *adoption* as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” In baptism we are given a new last name. We are now children of the God who created heaven and earth. We are now royalty. Through our adoption we now have forgiveness for our sin because of Christ’s death on the cross.

Number three, baptism is a sign of our death. That's part of the symbolism of the water. In addition to washing, the water represents death and burial. In baptism we die to our old sinful self. In our passage from Romans 6 Paul writes, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Baptism is a sign that we die to our old identity. We die to the things that divide us. We die to whatever separates us from Christ. Most of all, we die to our efforts to earn our way into heaven. We can't do it anyway. It's only when we die to self that we learn what living really is.

Fourth, baptism points to the promises of God. Verse 5 of our Romans passage says, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall *certainly* be united with him in a resurrection like his." That right there is the gospel message, the "good news." When our identity is found in Jesus, our future is found in him also. Jesus said, "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." This

isn't just a promise, it's a covenant. Baptism is the sign of the covenant God makes with us. Acts 2:39 reminds us, "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." God always keeps his promises.

Finally, Baptism serves as a sign of our consecration to God. 1 Corinthians 6 tells us that we are not our own, we were bought with a price. We are marked for a life of service to Christ and to other people. We are set apart from the world. Our lives should look different from that of the world around us. We are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. We have different priorities. We are to be obedient to the One who said, "I did not come to be served but to serve."

Today we have baptized two young people into Christ's service. Their parents have made promises to worship and to teach these children the faith. More importantly, God has made promises to them. And you and I have been reminded of our true identity. So let me ask you: who are *you*?

Amen