

## **“Redeemed by His Blood”**

**First Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Dave Carlson  
January 5, 2020**

**New Testament Lesson: Ephesians 1:3-11**

**Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 147:12-20**

In the early days of Ford Motor Company, a certain machinist was among those who “borrowed” tools and automobile parts over a number of years. Although it was against company policy, “everybody did it,” and management did nothing about it. One day, the machinist was converted. He was baptized and became a believer who took his baptism seriously.

The day after his baptism, he gathered up all the tools he had collected over the years, loaded them into his pickup, took them to the plant, and presented them to the foreman with his confession, and request for forgiveness.

The foreman was so overcome by his honesty that he cabled Henry Ford himself, who was visiting a European plant. After hearing about the entire event, Ford immediately cabled back this response: “Let’s dam up the Detroit River,” “and baptize the entire plant.” Such is the power of Baptism. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the only two sacraments of the PC(USA) denomination, because they are the only sacraments commanded by Jesus in the Bible.

Today in our New Testament lesson, the Apostle Paul speaks of “spiritual blessings,” being chosen for “holiness,” and “redeemed” through the blood of Christ, which is kind of a weird thing - redeemed through Jesus Christ’s blood and yet each of these gifts from God are given to us through baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

These two sacraments are among the greatest mysteries of our faith. So today, we are going to look at the relationship between baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and their effect on us as believers. How do baptism and the Lord’s Supper really work?

Of course, any answer to that will be only an approximation of the true power of the sacraments, because they are a mystery. But gaining insight even into a portion of such a divine and holy mystery can have a huge effect on our lives, our relationship to God and our relationship to one another.

Let's start by looking at the blessings of the sacraments of Baptism. Paul says God has "...blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...." The blessings of baptism are love and acceptance, faith and mission. We get our identity as God's children from our baptism, which allows us to experience heaven on earth.

We spend our lives growing into our baptism, becoming the precious children of God the Lord intends us to be. That's the holiness part – living into our baptism. Baptism claims us as blessed children of God and sends us into the world to live into that identity, leading others to do likewise.

Living into our identity as God's beloved children is not easy. For instance, Barry Bailey, writing in his article titled "What Makes a Nation Strong," refers to one of the questions of infant baptism asked of the parent, "Do you renounce the sins of the world?" To which Bailey says, "If I were that mother, I would think, 'No, I just barely got this child dressed to get here. I thought that was worth something. I just show up with my baby, and I have to renounce the sins of the world? ... This is pretty heavy. I might try my neighborhood or I might renounce the sins of my in-laws. That's enough; I'm not going beyond that.'"<sup>1</sup>

Of course, we are called to go beyond that, beyond just showing up. We are called to stand firm in our baptism to renounce or stand up against the sinful misguided ways of the world. Having been claimed as God's beloved children and sent to stand firm alongside the Lord, we have a holy calling. As Paul says, God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him, in love."

Now this begs the question: If we have been chosen – and by "we," our faith tells us all people have been chosen – if we have been chosen from the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless, why do we need to have communion each month. What's the purpose and power of all this?

We have communion each month to celebrate who we are as God's chosen people. Communion is also an opportunity to reevaluate your life, and to claim the power of the Holy Spirit to guide you along the way.

There is so much that pushes and pulls us in life – school or work, chasing after happiness through drugs and alcohol and sex, being put down by others or always having to be better than the next guy – lots of ways we get shoved around everyday, and they have nothing to do with God and Jesus, love and life.

We need communion each month to remind us of our weakness when we stand apart from the Lord, when we waver in our baptismal calling to stand firm.

We need communion each month to remind us of our connection to God and ground us in this family of faith, so that when the world starts pushing us around or pulling us in the wrong direction, we have at least the possibility of recognizing it, and the opportunity to turn back toward to God.

That is the spiritual gift of communion and the power of being chosen by God, the power of recognizing and accepting that we do belong to the Lord, the power of doing life together as the holy people of God, the power of being the church.

Paul goes on to say, “In (Christ), we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses. That statement points to another aspect of the mystery of our faith – the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ. But what does that mean?

Those living in the time of Jesus, those connected to the ancient practice of sacrificing animals in the temple to atone for the sins of the people, they would have understood what it means to be redeemed through the blood of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Barry Bailey, Forth Worth, Tex., “What Makes a Nation Strong,” 24 May 1992. But we don’t sacrifice animals for our sins these days. Never have. So how do we understand our redemption through the blood of Christ?

Well, our faith tells us that we are the spiritual descendants of the ancient Hebrew people, sharing their spiritual bloodline. And as such, we benefit from the covenant between God and God’s people, going all the way back to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

Through Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, God transformed blood sacrifices into a spiritual sacrifice. And through Jesus, God brought each and every one of us into that family of faith covenant of forgiveness.

Paul says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ....” In that father-and-son relationship, God and Jesus are one blood relatives, so to speak. Jesus is pure and holy and perfect in every way, blameless before God. And through Jesus, that is how we stand before God. As brothers and sisters in Christ, adopted by God through Jesus, we share a spiritual family bloodline. God forgives all our trespasses, all our sins, as a gift of supreme grace, freely bestowed upon us, in Christ.

What you do with that acceptance and forgiveness is up to you. We can either receive it thankfully, ever striving to live up to the blessing that it is – live into that Prayer of Confession we prayed today - or we can ignore it and go along making bad choice after bad choice.

No matter where you find yourself at this moment, God is here ready to embrace you as his beloved child, guide you as brothers or sisters in Christ, and empower you through the living presence of the Holy Spirit. You may want to use our Prayer of Confession from p.4 of today's bulletin to tap into the power of the Holy Spirit. Cut it out and put it on a mirror or refrigerator or in your pocketbook or wallet. Let that prayer work in your life as a reminder of who you are as a child of God, a brother or sister in Christ. Amen.

### **PASTORAL PRAYER**

God of goodness and mercy, of gentleness and kindness, of righteousness and faithfulness: be the light of our salvation and sustain our souls.

We offer to you the daily tasks that consume us, for we accomplish nothing without your grace.

We submit to your will that we should love you with our everything, and love our neighbors, and even our enemies, as ourselves.

Renew us and transform us by your steadfast love into the people of God.

And come to those most in need of your presence, granting them healing, comfort, provision of daily needs, and guidance in living according to your divine will.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who taught us to pray saying:

**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 debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**