

The St. John's Pulpit

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BAPTIZED INTO ONE ANOTHERING

1 Corinthians 1:10-15; 12:12-13

First Sunday after The Epiphany, January 10, 2016

A Sermon on Baptism by The Rev. Dennis W. Foust, PhD, Senior Minister



Every baptism proclaims two messages – commitment and community.

First, consider what baptism says about commitment. Almost 2000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth approached his cousin, John the Baptizer, beside the Jordan River. Jesus entered what is called a ‘mikveh,’ a gathering of fresh water for ritual immersion. In Judaism, a person enters a ‘mikveh’ for spiritual renewal or to commemorate a spiritual transition and commitment. Being immersed in the mikveh signifies a new beginning. When Jesus was immersed in the Jordan River, he was committing his life to a new beginning for him and for the entire world.

Today, Paul Pugh will be immersed in the ‘mikveh’ of our Baptist tradition. Paul’s baptism is an external expression of his internal experience. Paul has committed to follow Jesus Christ with every aspect of his life. This is a new beginning for Paul. In these waters, we symbolize a death and resurrection. In Paul’s baptism, we symbolize a new beginning as he is raised to walk as a follower of Jesus. Baptism speaks about commitment.

Yet, baptism speaks about more than commitment; baptism also speaks about community. Baptism is not about individualism; baptism is about relationships. Baptism is about a relationship between a person and God. Also, Baptism is a reminder that Jesus was baptized to begin a new community. Jesus knew that you need more than a commitment to God; you need a community committed to love as God loves.

Today, Paul Pugh is baptized into our community of faith. Like each of us, he has realized his need to make a commitment to God. And, also, like each of us, Paul needs a community committed to love as God loves. The early church had a phrase to talk about this kind of community; it is called, “*one anothering.*” Throughout Christian scriptures, the phrase, “one another” is used more than sixty times. “Honor one another;” “Forgive one another;” “Be devoted to one another;” “Be at peace with one another;” “Love one another.” Today, as we baptize Paul, we welcome him as our brother. We are his sisters and brothers. We are members of one another; we are one body – the body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul, not to be confused with Paul Pugh, wrote to the church in Corinth because they were divided. Paul received reports of quarrels among them. He asked them ‘*to be of the same mind and the same purpose.*’ Some people were saying, “*I belong to Paul,*” or “*I belong to Apollos,*” or “*I belong to Cephas.*” It was as if they were representing a variety of views or allegiances. Paul reminded them that they all belonged to Jesus, the Christ of God. They were – each and all – baptized into Christ. Yes, they were diverse persons. Yet, like a human body with many operating parts, they were still all one body; they were members of one another.

The human body consists of more than 200 bones, more than 600 muscles, enough blood cells to circle the Earth twice, more than 40,000 chemical enzymes and more than one hundred trillion cells. Yet, one body.

This past week, a prophetic pastor passed on ahead of us. In the past few decades, Dr. Bill Self was Senior Minister of Wieuka Road Baptist Church and John's Creek Baptist Church in metro Atlanta, GA. He was a bold voice on behalf of the local church. In his memory, I quote from a sermon he preached entitled, "*The Church is Worth the Effort.*"

"I still love the church. I love the church universal, as well as the church local (red brick, white-columned with deacons smoking in the parking lot). With all of its dysfunction and flesh marks, with all of its confusion and humanity, it is still the best thing God has going for Him in this world. We do have a treasure in earthen vessels.

The church is a solid oak tree, not a fragile tea cup. It has withstood Roman Imperialism, Jewish legalism, pagan optimism, medieval institutionalism, the excesses of the reformers, wars and rumors of wars, a youth quake, modern skepticism, southern provincialism, resurgent fundamentalism, and heresies in each generation that seem never to die. It can withstand anything our generation can throw at it.

It has been victimized by unprepared and selfish clergy, tone-deaf musicians, manipulative members, argumentative deacons, demanding denominations, unloving reformers, and greedy politicians. Still it continues to provide love, affirmation and community to the fallen in the face of alienation. The Church is worth the effort."

On this first Sunday of a new year, I call on you to revisit your mikveh – your baptism. No person, no allegiance, no commitment, no perspective, no institution nor any other influence should shape your life more than does your commitment to Jesus Christ and your membership in the body of Christ.

Today, St. John's, we welcome a new member into the body of Christ. He is part of us. And, we are part of him. When he hurts, we will hurt with him. When he celebrates, we will celebrate with him. Today, we baptize Paul Pugh because of his commitment to Jesus as Lord of his discipleship. And, we baptize Paul today into this one body of one another. *Every baptism proclaims two messages: commitment and community.*