



## ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON  
1-11-15

I can get all tied up in knots trying to figure out this baptism stuff. There's the different descriptions of baptism in the Bible and then there are the early rituals done when the Christian church was just forming and then there are the changing traditions that have been done for over a 1,000 years, including revisions in our Book of Common Prayer not that long ago. Jeesh –

Just start with the question – Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers? Hmm, I think so, not sure, what's it like – how do I know? So, those guys in Ephesus all spoke in tongues and prophesied and I'm pretty sure that didn't happen to me. So, what baptism did I receive – repentance, salvation, Holy Spirit, initiation into the church, welcome into the family, marked as Christ's own forever?

John's baptism was a cleansing ritual. In fact, Bob Eldan posted online that the Greek translation for baptism is better understood as a washing. So we could say John the washerman rather than John the Baptist. Can't you just see a determined mom or servant hanging onto a young child and saying, I'm going to give you a good washing. Just scrub you up and now there- you're clean. Stay there and stay that way. Which of course won't happen – for any of us. But there is John, telling us we all need a good washing. And even though folks go into the river – he refuses to wash the visiting Pharisees so we know that that washing is about the condition of our hearts – we get cleansed with hearts of repentance – which just like the little kid and his mom – we won't stay clean but we get one good washing and then we remember it and repent over and over when we remember that cleansing we received.

But here comes Jesus down to the river and he's going to get a good washing also. Wonder what for? But that's what he's doing – getting that cleansing in the river – he tells John that it is right that he do so- maybe it's solidarity with his and our human sides of ourselves. But we're told that John says the really important baptism is the one Jesus brings – which is with the Holy Spirit.

But Jesus starts out with water and then – BAM – the heavens are torn apart. Imagine that – the heavens tearing apart. That's got to be attention getting. Is that the baptism of the Holy Spirit – no wait – Jesus will provide the baptism with the Holy Spirit so this must be God's version of baptizing. The sky splitting open, a dove/spirit something descending and a voice declaring a beloved son. Wow – that baptism would be cool. So, Jesus gets cleansed and declared as

beloved and maybe he gets the Holy Spirit then also, but we don't hear about his speaking in tongues and prophesizing.

Nope that's the baptism of those folks in Ephesus – which would have been a wild moment also – a dozen folks starting with the water baptism and then hands laid on them – and they've got these amazing new abilities. Cool – that's how it worked for them

But not long after that we have these churchy type people trying to decide how to identify Christians- they've got the secret symbols and safe meeting places determined but just who do they let in? So along comes this ritual that starts with a catechumenate – or period of teaching – one to three years for adults only and then they can be baptized and come into the special meetings and receive communion. And baptism in a tank of water is written about as the final step after the education and the questions – then the water and in some places the oil and you can come on in to worship with the other Christians.

And hundreds of year later we have infants being baptized because their souls might be sinful and they might not get to heaven so they better get washed and marked as soon as possible. And for awhile baptisms were private and done only with the immediate family and some of the service was about naming the child and welcoming it into it's family.

And skipping ahead a bit – here we are today. We are going to baptize a baby. We are going to remember our own baptisms. And which baptism will little Jameson receive? And just what baptism did each of us receive?

See- if I am paying attention to all of the teachings and histories and writings out there about baptism – I can get tied up in knots.

So- I'm going to go with all of the possibilities – all of them.

Jameson will get washed, and in the name of Jesus she will receive the Holy Spirit and she will be initiated into the identity of Christ's body and she will be marked as Christ's own forever and she will be welcomed into our family and she will be baptized – into all the fullness and sacredness, holiness, and continuing mystery of baptism. And if we are paying attention, I bet the heavens will be opening and God will be declaring that here is another one who is beloved.

Thanks be to God.