

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Third Sunday in Lent, March 19, 2017

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 389, 634:5, 245:1-4, 301, 644.

Lessons: 2 Kings 5:1-16, Romans 6:1-11, Matthew 28:18-20.

Sermon Text: Mark 16:15-16

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As you heard in our previous sermon on Baptism, we orthodox Lutherans define a Sacrament as a sacred act, instituted by Christ himself. It uses earthly elements connected with God's Word. A sacrament offers, gives, and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. When we use the word "seals" we think of a seal that makes something genuine, that is, that we are really receiving what has been offered and given. We recognize two acts that meet this definition. They are Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. Today we consider

THE SPECIAL GIFTS OF BAPTISM

- 1. They are the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.**
- 2. Who receives these gifts?**
- 3. How can water do such great things?**

On Easter Sunday you will be assured again that Jesus Christ really rose from the dead. Today we hear again how Jesus offers, gives, and seals unto us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

Not every church believes and teaches of the benefits of baptism as Scripture presents them. With Martin Luther we believe, teach, and confess that Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. What is God's promise? Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark, ***"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."***

Jesus promises eternal salvation to ***"Whoever believes and is baptized."*** Since faith is the means through which we grasp and understand this salvation, Baptism must be the means through which faith is offered and given.

In agreement with the Bible our church teaches that Baptism is truly a means of grace, through which the Triune God offers his blessings to all who are baptized, and imparts and seals these blessings to all who believe the promise of Baptism. What God assured to us in our infancy in Baptism is valid and certain also in later life. ***"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you."*** Isaiah 54:10 (NIV)

Today we ask 'what great things does Baptism give or work?' It offers, it imparts forgiveness of sins; it delivers from death and the devil; and it gives eternal salvation to all who believe this.

First: Baptism offers and gives forgiveness of sins. We read in Acts the words of Peter: ***"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."*** Acts 2:38 (NIV) After Paul's conversion, he was told: ***"Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away."*** Acts 22:16 (NIV) Paul writes to the Galatians: ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*** Galatians 3:26-27 (NIV)

God's promise and assurance of forgiveness in Baptism covers all our sins; also those which we commit later in life. And it certainly is a great comfort for us to know that already in our early infancy God assured to us full forgiveness for all our sins. Because of Baptism, we should recognize that God cleanses us and clothes us with the merits, the righteousness, the perfection of Christ. We should often think of our Baptism and firmly believe that as surely as we were baptized into Christ, so certain it is that we clothe ourselves with the merits of Christ.

Second: Baptism delivers from death and the devil. ***“Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*** Romans 6:3-4 (NIV)

Through Baptism we have been given the merits of Christ. These merits include ***“that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”*** Hebrews 2:14-15 (NIV) Thus Baptism delivers us from death and the devil. We can rejoice knowing that because of our Baptism death and the devil have no longer any power over us.

And third: It gives eternal life and salvation. ***“Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*** Romans 6:3-4 (NIV) This also tells us that by Baptism we got into a death, namely, that we are buried with Christ into death, and that now we are to be "dead to sin". Paul continues a few verses later: ***“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”*** Romans 6:8 (NIV) and then goes on: ***“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*** Romans 6:11 (NIV) Even though we must suffer temporal death, we do not fear it, because Baptism assures to us eternal life. Thus even in the hour of death Baptism is a great comfort to us.

We know that Christ has earned all these blessings for us. By his suffering and death Christ has truly earned these blessings for us. However, Baptism is a means by which the Holy Ghost makes these blessings our own. Baptism is a means of grace. ***“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*** 1 Corinthians 6:11 (NIV)

2.

To whom does Baptism give all these blessings? Who receives these blessings?

You learned from Luther: “Baptism gives these blessings to all who believe, as the words and promises of God declare: ***“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”***”

These blessings are offered in Baptism to all who are baptized, and this offer is always valid and good, but only the one who believes the promises of Baptism actually receives what they offer. Anyone who does not believe does not get what God offers to him. Someone who later on falls away from the faith, indeed loses the blessings of Baptism, but he does not lose Baptism itself, and need not be rebaptized. From the point of view of God the covenant stands, and at any time a penitent sinner may comfort himself with the promises God made to him in Baptism. Remember God's promises such as Isaiah tells us: ***“my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.***” Isaiah 54:10 (NIV)

When we consider that Scripture says ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”*** we must ask the question: Can anyone be saved without Baptism?

We need only look at the thief on the cross, who confessed to Jesus ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*** Jesus answered him, ***“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”*** Luke 23:42-43 (NIV) Here you have someone who was not baptized but was assured of heaven.

It is unbelief that damns. Although saving faith cannot exist in the heart of one who refuses to be baptized, it can exist when for some reason Baptism cannot be obtained. Listen to what Luke tells us about rejecting the Baptism of John: ***“All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and***

experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.” Luke 7:29-30 (NIV)

Baptism is not absolutely necessary for salvation, because it is not the only means through which the saving merits of Christ's redemption are offered to us. The means by which God offers and gives us his grace are the Gospel in the Word of God and the Gospel in the Sacraments. This is the same gospel. This we call the means of grace. So the word of the Gospel does this. But because faith is the only way we can apprehend, receive, grasp, and take hold of the promise of grace either in the Gospel or in the Sacraments, faith is absolutely necessary. So Scripture tells us that a person can be saved without Baptism, but not without faith. Our text tells us **“whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** However, if any one despises Baptism and refuses to be baptized, then he despises Christ and the blessings Baptism offers, as the Pharisees did. Such a one does not have faith, and **“he that believeth not shall be damned”**.

3.

How can water do such great things? “It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts the word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul says in the third chapter of Titus.”

How are forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation obtained by Baptism? Listen to words from Titus: **“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”** Titus 3:5-7 (KJV)

The word of God places these great blessings into Baptism; and through faith, which trusts this word of promise, we accept the forgiveness, life, and salvation offered in Baptism and make these blessings our own. Remember that **“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.”** Ephesians 5:25-26 (NIV)

It is not the water in Baptism that washes away our sins, for only the blood of Christ can do this. **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** 1 John 1:9 (NIV) But by "the Word of God which is in and with the water" God himself joins and connects these blessings with the water of Baptism. So it is not the water which does "such great things", but God acting through his Word.

"Without the Word of God the water is simple water and no Baptism, but with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life", which offers grace, creates a new spiritual life, and thus gives the forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it.

So in order that we may receive what God has placed into Baptism, we must have faith, "which trusts the Word of God in the water". In the case of Naaman in our Old Testament lesson, the promise of healing was connected with the water of Jordan, and it was necessary for him to bathe in this river seven times, and not in any other river. Yet, Naaman did not trust in the water itself, but rather in the word of the prophet. So we do not trust in the water, but in the promise connected with the water.

Why do the Scriptures call Baptism the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost? Because in Baptism the Holy Ghost works faith and thus creates in us new spiritual life. We are born again. The Word of God not only puts these great things into Baptism for us to take by faith, but through that Word God also operates on our hearts and works the faith through which we receive these things. For Paul tells us that God saved us, he converted, us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he poured out on us abundantly. By the washing of the Word of God and baptism, the Holy Ghost regenerates and renews us, works faith and creates a new spiritual life in us. Thus it is that by Baptism we are made disciples of Christ, are justified, and made heirs of eternal life. In the case of infants our reason asks how can these things be? We cannot explain this, but we must not doubt the power of God.

May we rejoice today in our baptism! **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved!”** Amen.