

“Baptisms” Hebrews 6:1 – 2

“Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”

So by way of introduction this morning, what do you use as a reminder for all the appointments and other events in your life?

Most of us are busy people, we have plans and dates and so on.

How do you keep track of them all?

Tell the person next to you.

A phone. Calendar. Spouse😊

Our reading this morning talks about the elementary teachings of the Christian faith.

These are foundational Christian doctrines

For every Christian there is a foundation for your walk with God and for that foundation is 6 or 7 key areas.

These are areas that every Christian should be taught about.

The thing is, although they are foundational as human beings and as Christians we often need reminders of their importance.

So this week and last and the coming weeks are reminders.

Last week we talked about faith.

We talked about how faith in God is absolutely precious, more precious than gold.

And we talked about how our faith in God is put to the test and that not everyone passes the test.

However we know that God wants us to pass the test and so we looked ways our faith can be strengthened.

And then in our reading you have ‘instructions about baptism’ but ‘baptism_s’.

And when you do the research that word is linked to baptism but is not the usual word for baptism.

It’s a word that can be translated as “washings”.

We may think that's a bit strange.

When we think of washing we think of physical hygiene but if you were a Jewish person in the time of Jesus and Paul and the early believers, your mind would go to all sorts of ritual washing that needed to take place.

Priests for example, were required to wash their hands and feet before service in the Temple:

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die.”

Exodus 30:17 - 21

By the time of Jesus devout Jews had all kinds of washing practices - hands, cup and pots and pans.¹

It was all related to being acceptable to God.

But when Jesus came he said that these had their place but they're not enough.

The ceremonial and ritual washings need to go deeper to what is more important.

What is more important is what is going on, on the inside.

He said, for example, to this group of highly devout people called the Pharisees, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.” (Matthew 23:25).

So the washings spoken about here are what God wants to do within.

And you know, we do have people in our community and in our churches who are so aware of stuff that still sits there on the inside.

I mean, there are people who have done things and seen things and taken part in things for which they are ashamed.

¹ Mark 7:3 - 4.

There are people that have had things done *to them* that shouldn't have been done to anyone.

There are also people who have *done* things to other people that shouldn't have been done to anyone.

You look at some of the statistics... they're not good.

And it sits there for some people, sometimes for years and even decades.

So there's muck and there's mess and dung and there's dirt *on the inside*.

My question then, is

"What do most people do with their "dirt"?"

Tell the person next to you.

So people are the same with stuff - they try desperately to clean it.

Sometime by opening up to others.

Sometimes with counsellors.

And that can bring a measure of relief.

But often those attempts fail.

Then, when that doesn't work, they bury it.

And they bury their stuff under so many things; so many *ordinary* things.

Some people try to bury it under their work. They give themselves to long hours and long weeks thinking this will make the dirt go away.

Some people self-medicate. Alcohol or legal and illicit drugs.

Some people do it through compulsive spending.

Some people push it down inside themselves by the sheer force of their will.

But then when they lie awake at night the memories come flooding back and the sense of shame overtakes them yet again.

Yet our God can make people clean.

My next question is this:

“So how does God wash us?”

Again tell the person next to you.

For one, we do have to know that God does want to make us clean.

When God saw our mess and muck....He ran toward us.

We see this most graphically in the Cross.

We're told that Jesus although He knew what awaited Him, set His face like flint towards Jerusalem.

You see, on a Roman cross a person hung in agony, half dead and half alive , for days.

They would be covered in blood and flies.

They would be nibbled at by rats and pecked at crows.

Despite what you see in the great artworks, they would completely naked but unable to cover yourself.

And the whole point of a cross was to shame and humiliate and keep a person alive as long as possible.

Jesus chose this.

He was literally a bloody mess as He hung on the cross.

Even more than this – and what the Bible emphasises this – is on the cross he bore the sin of world and experienced God-forsakeness.

Jesus embraced the 'dirt' for our sake so we can become clean.

If that's God's intent, which it is, what's the means that God uses?

How does He bring this about in our lives?

When you read through Scripture there are three ways in particular come to the surface.

One way is through ***His Word***.

We're told in Ephesians that Messiah, Jesus, made His Church, His people clean through “the washing with water through the word...”²

You have to say, how does that work?

Well for one, Scripture can highlight the areas that need cleansing.

It can show up the dirt.

² Ephesians 5:26

Again not to shame us but to point us to the God who does offer cleansing.

And it's in Scripture too that we hear God's promises to wash us.

We can take 1 John 1:9 as our own:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and *purify* [cleanse] us from all unrighteousness."

What it means is the voices from the past are no longer the loudest.

Then in tandem with His Word is ***His Holy Spirit***.

Titus chapter 3 verse 5:

"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour"

We need the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit takes who Jesus is and what he has done and makes it real in our lives.

You see, Jesus took our dirt and made us clean; Jesus took our filth and gave us his purity.

And what the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness does, is He comes into our inner world and makes Himself a home.

Then takes what Jesus has accomplished for us and begins to wash away the muck.

The stuff that keeps you awake at night he begins to cleanse.

We become new people and have new beginnings.

We are made clean on the inside.

Our shame is taken by Jesus and we walk in a new dignity given by the Holy Spirit.

Then you have ***water baptism***.

There is a definite link in Scripture between water baptism and being washed. Water baptism is not just another ritual.

Baptism is a very physical thing. You get wet.

You are touched, you move, you experience.

It is incredibly tactile. It's not just words, it is something you do and is done to you.

It is an event.

Something significant and definitive happens in our lives.

Paul at his conversion is told, "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."³

In 1st Corinthians Paul speaks to a bunch of believers who had been into all kinds of awful behaviour. Some were into all kinds of sexual sin - they sexually permissive, sleeping with anyone or anybody; some were habitual binge drinkers; drinking to excess. There were those who were greedy, never content; enough was never enough. Others were verbally abusive, their words were like weapons. Then there were others who were thieves.⁴

But Paul goes on to say, that's what you *were*.

Now through what Jesus has done, you have been forgiven and set a part for God's service and you are now in right relationship with God and *you have been washed* – a reference to baptism – made clean, cleansed.

The stains of the past, the dirt and crud are washed away - they no longer define you.

Water baptism is an outward symbol of an inward reality; we are washed outside and in.

It signifies a new start: it is a clean break with the past; what has gone before is washed away.

We come up out of the waters of baptism clean and new.

You might be thinking, "Reece, I've walked with the Lord for years but the dirt still seems to linger."

There are times when what you may need is a confidante - who will pray with you so that what God has already done for you will become a reality in your life.

I had those people in my life.

And when it comes to our stuff, and talking about our stuff, we want to do it safely, confidentially, carefully and wisely

³ Acts 22:16

⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:9 - 11.

So to finish, a story:

A man tells a true story of a plane trip to Colorado Springs. As he was waiting to board the plane there was a little girl about five years old and she was just as cute as could be. She had pretty leather shoes, she had a fluffy dress, she had ribbons and bows in her hair, and she was jumping up and down. There was no escaping this noisy and happy girl who was clapping her hands and saying, "I'm gonna see Daddy, I'm gonna see Daddy." The man was thankful to be boarding the plane, because after ten minutes, what we cute became obnoxious and irritating.

However, when he found his seat who happened to be sitting right across from him? The cute and irritating little girl. And all the way to Colorado Springs, the man had to listen to her going, "I'm gonna see Daddy, I'm gonna see Daddy."

Being a short flight the only thing they gave out was cookies and Coca-Cola. Every time the flight attendant came down the aisle, this little girl would take a cookie and a Coca-Cola. He had never seen a little girl eat so many cookies and drink so much Coca-Cola in just a half hour.

As the plane approached the airport in Colorado Springs, there was a thunderstorm. If you have been in an airplane in a thunderstorm, you know what happened. The airplane began to bounce up and down, shift and shake and shudder.

Everyone was tens but as the little girl bounced up and down after drinking all those colas and eating all those cookies something happened...

There was an... eruption.

Now Coca-Cola does not smell bad. Cookies do not smell bad.

Therefore, you would think if you put cookies and Coca-Cola in a sweet little girl with ribbons and bows and patent leather shoes, what would come out would not smell bad.

The man said this was the stinkiest vomit he had ever smelled in his life!

And it just kept coming!

Just when he thought it was over she would heave again. And every time she heaved and he smelt that stink, he felt like heaving too.

He was so glad when the plane landed and pulled up to the gate. He was the first one out of his seat, down the aisle, and off the plane. And as he

rushed up the ramp to get into the terminal he saw this man in a gray flannel suit coming down the ramp eagerly looking for someone, and he instinctively knew who he was.

And so he lingered.

He wanted to see the great encounter, the great meeting, between Daddy and “Vomit-face.”

What happened next was incredible.

The man brushed by, yelled at his wife, “You go get the luggage; I want to hug my little girl!”

And when he saw this little girl, covered with vomit, smelling BAD, he swept up in his arms and hugged her and kissed her as though there wasn’t a thing wrong in the world.⁵

You know, whatever dirt or muck or mess there is in our lives, God runs towards us.

And just as the father in that story would have cleaned up his child
He can make you clean.

He can make you clean.

⁵ Tony Campolo, *Stories That Feed Your Soul* (Ventura, Ca: Regal , 2010), 30 – 31.