

Sermon Text for September 13, 2015

by

Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Colossians 2:8-14, Genesis 17:1-14

“Baptized in water”

At times I stand before you wondering if my role is that of commentator and interpreter of the current events that are happening in the world around us. As we saw the 14th anniversary of 9-11 come and go, an event which the following Sunday was addressed in every church in the world back in 2001. We also saw current events this past week which can change the landscape of our nation, or at least certainly require a commentary from the pulpit in the eyes of many.

What should a preacher say about the upcoming election and the candidates that are laid out before us, probably nothing if the church wants to keep its tax exempt status. But that is a choice. What should I say about the Iran deal, or the horrific images of the waves of immigrants sweeping toward the West. What about a Clerk of the Court who is not able to carry out her duties to which she was elected because of her faith in her God which pricks her conscience to object.

If we spent enough time together discussing these issues we would find we probably don't have much in common as a community, as a family, as the body of Christ. We do not gather together and eat pig on a spit or watch Don Welk and Mike Liggitt clean house in corn hole because we agree on these issues.

But we do have a common denominator which brings us together, allows us to love each other, allows us to look at each other as family. We can be different in so many areas and so many issues but it is our baptism in the blood of the lamb that brings us together. It is baptism which unifies us. This simple act which is a sign and a seal of faith in Jesus Christ is our identifying marker that we are united.

Over the past year or so we have had quite a few adult baptisms to go along with our handful of infant baptisms. I met with another young couple this past week and we will be baptizing their second child in a couple of week. I asked why here? The answer came back, because we see this as our church family. Baptism makes us a family.

So what does this have to do with Abraham you ask? Today we find God establish a covenant with Abraham and the sign of that covenant, what Abraham had to do in order to receive that covenant was circumcise himself and every single male in his family and in his possession. Circumcision is the pre-cursor to baptism. It is the sign and the seal that Abraham and his people were claimed by God, just as baptism serves that role for us today within the Christian family. It is that which sets us apart as it set Abraham apart. It is a tradition, a ritual, a command from God which we have to embrace in our lives.

READ

I want to be sure that after today we are all able to see circumcision as the precursor to baptism and how that idea fits so neatly and perfectly into our understanding of baptism. But first we have to see the origin of circumcision which happens to be our next verses in Genesis. Abraham encounters God. 13 years ago Ishmael was born to Hagar and Abraham is now 99 and still no legitimate heir has been produced according to the fulfillment of the promises that God has made to him.

In this encounter the first thing God does is not provide a son, but another promise that this son is coming and coming soon. He emphasizes this by changing Abraham's name to ancestor of a multitude. Every verse for the first 8 verses God promises Abraham that he will make him numerous, exceedingly numerous. Almost to underscore the impossibility of the situation so that when it happens all eyes have to go to God and not the ability of Abraham or Sarah.

As God speaks to Abraham we find that in the first 8 verses he uses the words consistently "I will". The point is that God is trying to show us in Scripture that He is the one who takes the initiative. God takes the initiative with all of the covenants that he has ever made with us. This aspect is absolutely crucial to remember when we transition from circumcision to baptism. We will see that the originator, the initiator is always God, including in baptism and the responder, the recipient is always us. Those two elements should never be rearranged.

Then starting in vs. 9 we hear, "as for you". This is what is required of you. This is what you have to do. The sequence of these events cannot be confused. It is not our decision and our reaction that then sparks God to take actions. No, God has promised, made his covenant with us, and we are the recipients.

With Abraham the promise was twofold, remember vs. 4 and vs. 8 contain God's promise to Abraham. You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations and vs. 8 I will give to you and to your offspring all the land of Canaan. As for Abraham circumcision served as the act which reflected our acceptance of God's gift. Circumcision signified to Abraham's family that they were chosen by God, even before they could choose God themselves.

God even becomes very specific in vs. 12 as to when this is to take place for a male, at 8 days old. If you go to Luke 2:21 we see that Jesus when he was 8 days old is taken to the temple and presented before the Lord to be circumcised as a sign and seal that God had claimed him before he could even be aware.

Do you see the seamless transition from circumcision to baptism. As we baptize a baby nothing is more powerful than the fact that Jesus has claimed this child and made the child a child of God long before the baby can even agree to it. Our decision to follow Jesus is a response, but it in no way dictates the action of our Savior upon the cross for us which preceded it.

I think we covered Abraham in Genesis and circumcision and its connection to our modern day baptism. So let's go to Colossians and see how all of this fits neatly not only in our understanding of baptism, but also our lives which ought to be consecrated and set aside as Paul tells us.

In these verses we see Paul use so many familiar terms to describe everything that Jesus has done for us. We read that Jesus erased our sins, nailed our sins to the cross, we were dead in our sins, Jesus is God, all of these concepts come to the fore here in Colossians and in these verses.

Paul warns us to be careful to not fall prey to attractive ideas and concepts that exist in the world but are not centered upon Scripture as it defines Christ. We find ourselves attracted to ideas where we are the originators of the ideas, where we are the controllers of our future. We love philosophies where the decisions that we make are independently made by us without any need for help from outside spiritual guides. Paul tells us that we received a spiritual circumcision in our baptism which was once and for all, it was complete, nothing can be improved on it.

Jesus in the covenant established baptism as the sign and seal of our dying to sin and our rising with him to eternal life as we read in vs. 12. Our baptism claims us and seals us once and

for all as a child of God. The parallel between our baptism today is complete with the circumcision given to Abraham all those years ago.

The difference between the old covenant is that God only made it with Israel and the men within that covenant community. In baptism, and so today, the land belongs to all of us and the covenant is no longer just for Israel, but for all of us. In baptism the claim of the promised land and of the people no longer holds for one nation but rather for a family of those chosen by God in baptism.

We live in an area of the country where our response to God's grace is emphasized while this Scripture very clearly reflects that our response of baptism is predicated upon God's action of grace. Baptism is not a believer's act but rather a sign and a seal of the person being baptized that they were claimed by God even before they were able to respond to God.

In circumcision an 8 day old was sealed into the covenant. The cutting away of the flesh was a renunciation of human effort. So in baptism we are washing away our efforts to be justified and put on God's grace that was offered to all of us freely.

The result of all of this should be a recognition that our efforts are never sufficient. Only by God's grace can we recover from 9-11. Only by the presence of God are we able to deal with the societal issues that face us today.

Don't forget your baptism, even if you can't remember it, know that you have been sealed, claimed, embraced in the family forever through God's covenant. It is what keeps us together. Amen.