

Baptism For Real

Matthew 28: 16-20

The Holy Trinity, June 11, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Jesus is risen from the dead!

Because He is risen from the dead, He can do anything. He has authority over everything. He has authority over everything on earth. He reigns over every power and dominion on the earth. No matter how powerful the person is on earth, he will answer to Jesus. He reigns over every power and dominion in heaven. He reigns over the angels. He sits at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

And what does Jesus do with this awesome power and authority which grants Him reign over every principality and power in heaven and on earth?

He sends His apostles to make disciples of all of the nations.

He could have sent them to destroy! He could have sent them to bring an end to the evildoers and sinners of the earth! He could have sent them to perform miracles to wow the nations into submission to His holy and divine rule. He could have made the rulers of the nations tremble in their boots and bow the knee to Him. He could have forced everyone by His almighty power to do good.

Instead He sends His apostles to baptize and to teach.

Notice that Jesus does not command baptism in Matthew 28.

Pastors including myself have said for a long time that Jesus institutes baptism in Matthew 28. While that is true Jesus does not command baptism in Matthew 28. What Jesus commands is the creation of disciples.

Disciples are followers of Jesus. They learn from Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel the disciples are the ones who possess the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven. Those who are outside of the company of disciples are the ones that the Lord speaks to in parables.

In other words when it comes to someone who is not a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, He speaks to them in a cryptic way so that they will not receive the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. I have seen this happen even in our own day and age when I have had the rare occasion to read from the Bible in an unbeliever's home. After reading several verses of Holy Scripture the unbeliever complained to me, "Why are you reading all of that? Just tell me plainly." When I told her plainly she immediately put what I said into the category of Pastor's opinion. She did not heed it or pay attention to it, but did compliment me on how directly I was able to put things. You see? It was all cryptic to her. She did not want to listen. She was not among the company of the disciples. The secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven were read in her living room and she could not perceive them.

If a person is a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ has given him the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. Our Lord says to His disciples, "The secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven have been given to you." The secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven include the secrets of His grace and the secrets of everlasting life, among other things.

Therefore being a disciple of Jesus is a pretty important thing. If a person is a disciple of Jesus, he understands the words of Jesus and knows the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. If a person is not a disciple of Jesus, Jesus speaks to them in parables in judgment on them because they do not get it.

In Matthew 28 Jesus demonstrates that He really is the God who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. He commands His apostles to make disciples of all of the nations. When the nations are disciples, they will all have the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven.

Now when our Lord was walking on the earth He made disciples by going up to people and saying, "Follow Me." Sometimes He would give them a reason to follow Him and sometimes not. The Lord distinguished Himself from other ancient rabbis who did not go out and find their students, but rather waited for students to come to them. Famous rabbis like Gamaliel had waiting lists of people who wanted to become their disciples.

Our Lord knew that if He waited for disciples to come and choose Him as a teacher that no one would do so. He not only lacked notoriety He also wanted to distinguish Himself from the rabbinical practices of His time. Furthermore the nature of His catechesis was such that if He waited for people to come to Him no one would come to Him because of the nature of things that He was teaching. In other words since Jesus was teaching divine things and human nature is opposed to divine things, if Jesus were going to have any disciples at all, He was going to have to choose them. In their human nature they certainly would not have chosen Him. So as odd as it was to the people of His day, He was the one rabbi who went around looking for disciples and when He found one that He wanted, He went up to them and said, "Follow Me."

Peter and Andrew, James and John, left their fishing nets and followed Jesus. Matthew left His tax collector vocation and followed Jesus. In fact Jesus and His original disciples point out that His disciples had left home and family to follow Him.

They became disciples when the Lord said, "Follow Me." He instructed them on the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven.

You and I therefore have a special problem. We live after the ascension of our Lord into heaven. Jesus does not typically walk around and call people to follow Him. If Jesus did appear it would be to appear in glory, bring an end to all things, and render judgment. Since that is the purpose of our Lord's next appearance and laying aside for the moment the special nature of His summoning Paul the apostle who became not only a disciple but also an apostle, how then do we become disciples of Jesus when He is not on earth anymore going up to people and saying, "Follow Me."

That is what Matthew 28 is designed to answer. With all of the authority in heaven and on earth Jesus commands His apostles to make disciples of the nations. Make disciples of all of them so that all of them will know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven and be saved.

If someone is an apostle, how does one make a disciple of Jesus? The apostles cannot go up to people and say, "Follow Me." A disciple of Jesus follows Jesus not an apostle. So Jesus gives the apostles the methodology for creating disciples of Jesus. He tells them, "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, instructing them to keep all I have commanded for you and I am with you always even until the completion of the age." That is how a disciple is made.

When Jesus grants this methodology for creating disciples He is granting a gift that He is under no obligation to grant. In other words Jesus is not obliged to a sinful humanity to give them the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven by making them disciples. He could have kept the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven to Himself and left us to be damned in our sins. It would have been perfectly fair for Him to do so. None of us deserves to be a disciple of Jesus.

Therefore these words of our Lord are not to be taken in a legalistic fashion. What I am about to say is not to be taken in a legalistic fashion. The words of our Lord are to be taken in the way that they are given: as a means for bringing the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven to the nations. All authority in

heaven and on earth was given to Jesus and now He is going to give the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven to the nations through the apostles.

Therefore He tells the apostles, "Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Instruct them in everything that I have commanded for you. I am with you every day until the completion of the age."

A disciple is made when a person is baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and when they are instructed in everything that Jesus has commanded for us. When God and our Lord talk about baptism this is what they mean. They are never talking about baptism separate from the instruction.

So barring exceptional circumstances if a person is baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and then not instructed in everything that Jesus has commanded for us, then they are not a disciple of Jesus. They do not have the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. They have not been instructed in them.

Also barring exceptional circumstances if a person is instructed in everything that Jesus has commanded for us, but is not baptized into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit they do not have the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven either. If they did they would know that baptism saves by the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and would not have dreamt of not being baptized.

So grandparents, if your grandchild is not baptized and you put pressure on your children to get the grandchild baptized and your son or your daughter makes arrangements with me to have your grandchild baptized and the grandchild is baptized, but then their dad and mom never bring them to the instruction the child is as much a disciple of Jesus as an unbaptized child is.

And here I must confess the sin of the clergy including myself. We pastors, myself included, have spoken about baptism separate from the instruction. While our Lord does distinguish between the baptism and the instruction He does not envision one being given without the other. In fact we dare not give baptism without instruction or instruction without baptism. Instruction given without baptism is rarer in the Church's contemporary practice, but it does occasionally happen and when it does it is typically because the person being instructed has not embraced the instruction or he has been instructed badly.

For us clergy to talk about baptism separate from the instruction is to make baptism into some kind of magic trick that covers you as far as God is concerned and you don't have to worry about the judgment anymore because you are baptized. So let me confess my sin, request your forgiveness, and as a fruit of my repentance point out to you that barring exceptional circumstances, when I say baptism I mean baptism and instruction. I am talking about the creation of disciples.

Now, a word about the thief on the cross. The thief to which I am referring is the criminal who was crucified along with our Lord who appealed to the Lord for help. Luke's gospel records the incident. Our Lord was crucified in between two criminals who were crucified on either side of our Lord. One of them reviled the Lord saying, "Aren't You the Christ? Save Yourself and us." While the words that he spoke might sound devout Luke's gospel informs us that he was reviling Jesus. He was speaking sarcastically as we say. He did not actually believe that Jesus could save him. He was simply trying to make himself feel powerful in his last moments by mocking the guy who was dying next to him. The other criminal however rebuked the first criminal and said, "Don't you fear God? We are getting what our deeds deserve, but this man (referring to Jesus) has done nothing wrong." Then the criminal said to

Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus turns to him and says, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise."

What happens in Christian conversations about this incident goes something like this, "The criminal on the cross who appealed to Jesus for help was never baptized, therefore baptism is unnecessary." I would also point out although I have never heard anyone say this that Luke does not even record the criminal's catechesis. He did not attend Divine Service so far as we know. There is no record of him being instructed. It is safe to assume that he had to have been instructed somehow because He knows who Jesus is, that He has done nothing wrong, and that there is a Kingdom into which Jesus is entering and he wants to be a part of it. That is pretty in the know. How did he come by this knowledge? Luke does not tell us. The reason that Luke does not tell us is because that is not the point of the account on the criminal on the cross. When we make the account of the criminal on the cross a discussion point for the necessity of baptism and the necessity of instruction, we are twisting the passage for a use for which it was not intended. Luke doesn't say whether or not this man was ever baptized. He could have been baptized by John for all we know and returned to his bad habits and got caught and crucified. He could have been part of the crowds that received in the instruction of Jesus Himself for all we know or even merely heard reports about Him. It obviously does not matter to God or He would have had Luke tell us how the criminal came by such knowledge. The point of the account of the criminal on the cross has to do with the Kingdom of God. The criminal says, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus replies, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." The thief wants Jesus to remember him when Jesus enters into His kingdom. Jesus remembered him that very day! That means that Jesus was entering into His kingdom even as the criminal is asking to be remembered in the Kingdom of Jesus. Therefore Jesus is entering into His kingdom when He is crucified and it is from His crucifixion that He remembers penitent sinners and gives them paradise. That is how the king reigns in His kingdom!

When it comes to baptism, assuming the criminal was not baptized, which we do not know, his is an exceptional circumstance. He is being crucified. This is similar to a child newly baptized dying in a car wreck on the way home from church and never having the opportunity for instruction.

The point of the Lord's instruction to His apostles in Matthew 28 is not to give you a two step process for becoming a disciple of Jesus and thus being saved as if your salvation depended on you performing the two steps to become a disciple. If that were the case Jesus would have commanded the nations to get themselves baptized and enroll in instruction. That is not what Jesus says. Jesus rather commands His apostles to baptize the nations and to instruct them thereby making disciples.

Now people, we are not under unusual circumstances. We are sitting by Homer Lake in Divine Service. Are you baptized? Is it your intention to be baptized? Are you instructed? Is it your intention to be instructed? Then you are disciples of Jesus and the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven are yours.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.