

60% H<sub>2</sub>O

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 and Acts 8:14-17

*(This service involved a Reaffirmation of Baptism, which is included at the end of this sermon.)*

On a wall in my office, hang several framed reminders of significant milestones in my journey to becoming an ordained minister. From Andover Newton Theological School, there is my Master of Divinity degree and my certificate of induction into the Jonathan Edwards Honor Society. There is my Certificate of Ordained Ministerial Standing which was conferred upon me by the Pilgrim Association of what was at that time the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ. And there is a plaque of appreciation from the First Baptist Church of North Attleboro, where I completed my year of Field Education experience.

A much smaller and simpler frame than any of those sits on my desk. The document behind the glass of that frame reveals its age, in the creases and wrinkles from having been folded and tucked away, and in its slightly yellowed color. The words are not printed in a distinguished font. They are handwritten with an ordinary ball point pen. The most important distinction though, is that it does not record any accomplishment of my own doing. But it has everything to do with something that was *done for me* by Jesus. It is the original copy of my Baptismal Certificate, dated June 16, 1957, when I was only 18 days old.

It is said that one of the great Founding Fathers of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, whenever he struggled with insecurity about his fitness for the ministry to which he was called, would remind himself out loud, "I am baptized." I keep my Baptismal Certificate on my desk so that it is never out of sight when I answer the phone or when I'm conversing with someone seated across the desk from me. Because I too, need that reminder, not to trust only in what I can do, but in what Christ can do through me.

I'm sure that your homes or offices also hold reminders of the events and relationships that have been milestones along the journey to who and where you are today. They may not all strike you as being obviously related to your baptism, the way a seminary degree or a certificate or Ordination might be. The truth is, though, that the means and ways of living out your baptism can be as private as how you show love in your relationships to family, friends, or strangers. Or, they can be as public as the ways you engage issues as broad as stewardship of the earth or the assurance of equal justice for all people. The opportunities for expressing the person you are by virtue of your Baptism goes far beyond what takes place within the walls of this building. But being part of a community of baptized believers uniquely keeps before us a vision of our baptismal identity as disciples of Jesus, through whom the Holy Spirit works to guide and empower us to further God's word and mission in the world.

They say that the average human body is about 60% water. Most of who we are and what we are capable of doing depends on the presence of and proportion of H<sub>2</sub>O. If the quantity of water in our physical body gets depleted it is important that it be replenished or the body

begins to experience a reduction of performance. The organs don't work at peak performance. The muscles cramp. We need to rehydrate regularly to maintain the right water level. Just as our physical life is impacted when the required percentage of water for optimal health is neglected: so too, our spiritual life is affected when we ignore the ongoing importance of our baptism. We may find ourselves running on empty when it comes to our commitment to the responsibilities and challenges that come with being a baptized follower of Jesus.

In the Book of the Acts of the Apostles there is a perfect illustration of how baptized Christians can lead spiritually de-hydrated lives. In it, some Samaritans had accepted the Word of God and were baptized into faith in Jesus. But two of the Apostles—Peter and John—thought it necessary to make a special trip from Jerusalem to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit. Luke—the author of the Book of Acts—takes the trouble to explain why. He writes, “For as yet the *Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*”

A recurring theme in the Book of Acts is that when the Holy Spirit comes upon people, they are empowered to accomplish remarkable expressions of God's power that would never have been possible otherwise. These Samaritans were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Which means that they had repented of their sins, accepted the salvation that comes through Jesus, and knew themselves to be forgiven and beloved children of God. But there was little if any noticeable *outward* change in them that might reflect the *inner* transformation they had undergone. They needed Peter and John to jump start their baptism in order for it to be effective.

Sometimes, *we all* need *our* baptismal reservoir to be replenished in order for the Holy Spirit to work through us. Our spiritual wells can run dry. We grow weary of keeping up the pace of discipleship and church membership. 60% H<sub>2</sub>O might be enough to maintain a healthy physical body. But when it comes to the Body of Christ—the Church—running on only 60% of the Baptismal energy of any congregation eventually leads to breakdowns in the effectiveness of its work and witness. Congregationalism in particular recognizes the importance of the ministry of *all believers*. Congregational polity is built upon the conviction that the Holy Spirit works through *every* baptized member; and that any church is at its best when its ministry is fueled at or near 100% of the Baptismal H<sub>2</sub>O of its membership.

This year, it has been exceptionally challenging to find enough volunteers to fill all the vacant offices and committee positions needed to sustain the quantity and quality of ministry for which this church has long been known. This morning we will pause to re-hydrate our baptismal reserves, where they may be running near empty. We too, might need the support of others to help us rehydrate our faith, as John and Peter had to help the newly baptized Samaritans. We will invite the Holy Spirit to re-energize our spirits and open our hearts to reconsider where we *each* might have a role to play in sharing equally in the ministry of First *Congregational* Church of Westminster. We will remember and reaffirm together the baptismal promises you made if you were baptized as an adult who could speak for yourself. Or which were made over you by

your parents if you were baptized as an infant. After reading each set of Baptismal questions I will leave a brief pause for you to silently listen for a specific invitation that they might be speaking to you; a personal calling to re-appropriate the original meaning and power of your baptism.

Then, those who desire to symbolically reaffirm your baptism to come up to the Baptismal font, beginning with those seated in the back-most pews and working forward. When you stand before the font, I will use this spritzer to give a gentle mist of water, containing water from the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized, above your head.

And now, let us hear again, and reflect upon, our Baptismal Promises:

**Do you promise, by the grace of God,  
to be a disciple, to follow in the way of Jesus Christ,  
to resist oppression, to show love and justice,  
and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ, as best you are able?**

*(A moment of silent reflection on the promises and prayerful attention to our response.)*

**And do you promise, according to the grace given to you,  
to grow in your faith and to be a faithful member of the church,  
celebrating Christ's presence and furthering God's mission in all the world?**

*(A moment of silent reflection on the promises and prayerful attention to our response.)*

*People come to the Font to reaffirm their baptismal covenant.*

#### **PRAYER OF RECOMMITMENT**

**By your Holy Spirit, Almighty God, Grant us Love for others, Joy in serving you, Peace in disagreement, Patience in suffering, Kindness toward all people, Goodness in evil times, Faithfulness in temptation, Gentleness in the face of opposition, Self-control in all things. Then strengthen us for ministry in your name. Amen.**

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