

Baptism Sermon

Sermon Text: Mark 10:13-16



And they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." ¹⁶ And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them.

We have come here today to baptize Josua Aren Schulz. Family members have come, his godmother from South Africa is also taking part in it today. So it's worth asking what do we actually do when we baptize? Is it that the church fathers saw other religions practicing ritual washing and thought it looked good and that's why Christians should also try it out? Or must we imagine it much more simply? Is it only about us wanting to establish before the gathered congregation what we should now call Josua? Many actually think that a person's name is important for baptism, that's why they say: I was christened as Hans, Peter, or Paul. Since then, people even say that about cars and ships, that they are christened with a certain name. If it's all about the name, why must the child have water poured over its head three times? Can't a person just publicly say: This child is now called Josua? Interestingly, Martin Luther already dealt with this question and therefore he asks: "How can water do such great things?" And then he came to the answer that we learn to this day in confirmation class: "Certainly not just water, but the Word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this Word of God in the water."

So, baptism really only has to do with one name, the name of Jesus. Jesus is the basis point where everything begins and it is this Jesus who is important at baptism. Jesus tells us that baptism is neither a ritual custom nor a name-giving, but baptism has to do with the living God who accepts us on the day of baptism. Jesus says: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me... therefore [baptize] them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:18,19)

With baptism, we are also physically connected with Jesus. After that, we belong to Him. That means that we are a part of His family. We are also not only a part of His family, but we become one with Him: He in us and we in Him. It is sad that Christian baptism in Germany is seen as just a tradition by many people, where parents give their child a name. In many countries, people are well aware that through baptism, they are clearly confessing Jesus. People are also well aware that baptism doesn't only mean that I get a new name, but it means that I now belong to someone else. I have passed from the realm of Satan to the realm of God. This gets under your skin and can't be hidden. In Iran, there is a great saying that goes like this: "Shotor savori dola dola nemische." That means: Whoever rides a camel no longer needs to cower. The image comes from the old days and refers to a camel rider who must travel through a dangerous area. Here, you can either try to walk and move from tree to tree so that you can get from one place to another as invisibly or unobtrusively as possible. But whoever rides a camel has decided differently. He knows that he has a fast and safe mode of transportation to get from one place to another... but he is visible for everyone to see because he is recognizable from afar. But whoever now rides on a camel no longer needs to try and hide himself because that's meaningless. That's how it is with Christians. When we are baptized, we receive another new identity. We become Christians. Christ now lives in us. When Christ lives in us, it also means that we live in a completely new world. We have passed from death to life. It is now also visible to the whole world that we are Christians. That can no longer be hidden because we have stepped from one world into another. We are now citizens of a different world, we are no longer citizens of the old world. I will explain how that happens with the help of an

example. You might remember how a few years ago, a group of children went into a cave with their teacher. Heavy rains had filled up the cave so that the way back to freedom for these children was blocked by water. These children could see the water rising higher and higher. They realized that sooner or later, they would drown in the little cave. There was only one way out for them – they would have to go through the water to get to the rescue. They might have said, we'll try to make ourselves as comfortable as possible in our little hideout. We can at least dry ourselves here, bandage our wounds, and see how far we can make our provisions last. Maybe things would turn out well after all. But it was clear that the bandages and provisions would only help temporarily because the water came even higher and higher. The only way out was through the dangerous water into freedom. Baptism is similar to this because baptism means that we are baptized into Jesus' death. Death in this sense doesn't just mean physical death but everything that has to do with death, to be specific, the devil with all his powers and also with our own personal guilt. All of this sounds so horrible that many shy away from talking about such things: sin, death, and the devil are terms that many think have to do with the Middle Ages. We can stay out of that. The death of Jesus is also terribly cruel so that we shy away from it. Yet even we modern people know that there is wickedness. There is also wickedness in our own hearts that we must deal with and in the end, we must all deal with our own personal death. That's why some shy away from it and say: I don't need all of that anymore. These people think that they can just get along as best they can with life in the here and now... But the thing is like the example I told about the children in the cave – before us is death and floods of water separate us from the Living God who is Life. The water climbs higher and there is only one way out: through the water into freedom. Baptism is such water for when we are baptized, we are baptized into Christ's death. This is something wonderful because it means that we don't have to go through death with our own lives. We don't have to die like Christ on the cross for all the evil that has happened in the world. Jesus did all of that for us and when we are baptized, we go through this cross. Just like the children, we pass through the floods of the cave to reach God, life, and freedom in the end. As I explained in the example earlier of the children in the cave, it was a little different from baptism. In the example I told about the children in the cave, each child had to have the courage to go into the water and swim as fast as possible to the other side. This is different in baptism. It is different because Jesus Himself took this courageous step into death for us. In baptism, we merely receive what Jesus did for us. The adult disciples who lived at the time of Jesus thought that in order to have faith, you had to summon up a lot of strength to conjure up faith from within. That is human thinking and leads to many mistakes. If people thought this way, it would then mean that there are some people who believe a lot and some others who believe little. Jesus turns the tables and says something completely different – the children shouldn't become like the adults so that they can finally believe. Jesus says the opposite: the adults should become like children because the children do nothing but receive faith. We have experienced all of this "live" today. Josua became a child of God. Humanly speaking, he does not know about this yet. This is a decision not made by him, but by God.

Now some might think, how can you expect such big things from a small child who doesn't know anything yet? How can you expect a child at the beginning of his life to take this path of faith when that is such a clear commitment to God? And can a child even already believe in God? Jesus tells us something astonishing about children. At that time, mothers brought their children to Jesus. And Jesus' disciples said exactly what many say today: "They don't yet understand any of this... take them away! They only disturb the adults!" At this, Jesus became furious and said don't do that! He continued by saying: "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." Jesus wants to tell us today, in order to have faith, we should all use Josua as an example. What is Josua doing? He is still laying unaware and blissfully asleep in the arms of his parents. With this, Josua shows us how faith works. Faith means to fall asleep peacefully in the arms of the Living God. Amen.