

Baptism Points
by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Holy Spirit Litany adapted from Psalm 51

Pastor: Create in me a clean heart, O God,

All: and renew a right spirit within me.

Pastor: Cast me not away from your presence,

All: and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Pastor: Restore to me the joy of your salvation,

All: and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Pastor: We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

Acts 4:23-31 ²³ When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they

were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 8:1&26-38 And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Acts 4:29-30... *grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand ...[and all these things are done in your name]*

What is it do you suppose that convinced the spouse, or the friend, or the coworker of the early Christian to go to church with them? How is it that these early Christians got people through that initial hurdle of just showing up to one of these meetings were amazing and dramatic things were happening in Jesus' name?

Do you think they finally felt prepared for those conversations? Were they waiting for the right moment? (pause) What are we waiting for?

The reason the church became and still is the single largest nonviolent-social change the world has ever known is because it wasn't and never has been of human origin.

People gathering to hear His voice is what God's wants, and God gets what He wants. God also wants people to stop looking at themselves and their responsibilities and their contribution to the world and start seeing, once again, what God is doing in the world. It is not only OK, but necessary that you stop looking at the 1% you might possibly be able to muster and dwell on, be consumed by the very real 100% of your life and action that is dependent on God. It is all God, all the time, always has been.

In the time of the early church the distraction was a strong moral obligation to please God. That is what consumed people. And that is the thing from which the early church... set people free!

The same is true for us today. We feel a strong moral obligation to please the world, ...to send value signals, ...to be successful, ...to prove our worth. Do you do this?? God has come to set you and

your neighbors free from this endless rat race of human accomplishment. You are free to stop focusing on your part and what you must do. That tower of Babel will fall.

Much like in Jesus day, and Luther's day... in 2026 despite all the changes of church and culture over the last 50 years... You and your neighbors ... we find ourselves more consumed with ourselves then ever. The world is ripe for another – Holy Spirit revival.

A Spiritual and cultural movement where we get over ourselves and start to see God's beautiful creation and church for what it truly is. The church and worship and the Sacraments exist to point us to Christ. Baptism points us to Christ. Baptism is only about us in so far as it makes us see what God has done, is doing and always will do!

Religion stinks. Religion points to us, human beings, and the lie that we might be able to merit God's Grace or contribute in some way. Revival happens when we stop pointing to ourselves and are turned to a place where we see and point to God.

We either focus on what we can do OR what God has, does, and promises to do. God promises to reunite us with himself. Jesus is the one who creates our belief and faith therefore it is only He that can save. It is only He who can speak into our lives in such a way that we treasure what He has done. Baptism is the most dependable and powerful ways God has done that through history. Specifically, because it does not depend on our response. You were Baptized and God is not going back on that. He knows it unites us to Him... He knows this more than we will ever know or understand.

So, the better question is not what we must do in Baptism or salvation, but what is God doing? He is calling, gathering and

enlightening and sanctifying one holy people in His Christian church where he saves us from the guilt and claims of our sin. This is a daily work that is strengthened best not by recalling a moment when we claimed God, but a moment when He claimed us. Baptism.

The first 4 chapters of Acts are defined by the struggle between Peter and the ruling authorities in the city of Jerusalem.

And Peter, because of God's work through him, was winning every confrontation left and right. The crowds adored Peter and the people of the early church. Some one was bound to die, but it didn't happen until the end of chapter 6 because God was winning in the court of public opinion. People had finally start looking up.

What did Peter do that made the appeal to be a Christian who worships and hears God's voice so strong. He pointed to God. The early Christians simply helped the people in their lives take a step back from themselves to hear and see the creative work of the creator. There is a God and it is not me. And that God is active. What stood out to others about the early Christians is that they had simply stopped trying to prove themselves. There were people in the neighborhood who, from time to time, were able to stop running that rat race.

And what happened when they stopped worrying if they had enough or were enough? They were set free to respond to each moment with care and compassion, seeing not their need, but the need of others.

What could in your life... possibly change your perspective so drastically that you stop worrying about your own survival, the success of your kids, your own reputation...

This can only happen if there is a power and presence in this world that is actually at work in things far more than we give it credit. This can only happen if we are awakened to the reality of how little control we have over our own actions, much less the choices of others.

We can only give up the rat race, we can only be freed from proving ourselves... when we lift our eyes to see the reality, and presence and power of God in our lives... and the lives of those we love.

God is no tame Lion. God is not passive. God not only knows what you need to have faith and life and joy... he is already doing what you need in ways you will never know and are not humanly capable of perceiving.

God is God, and you are not. God is the creator, the sustainer and you don't have to be. Your contribution is and has been fairly ineffective so far. It has been God the whole time at work in you.

Who you are and what you do in this world has never been about you. You are a vessel for a power and a presence that it is so far beyond our comprehension we simply cannot see it. Your life, and who you are, and the beautiful things that make you, you. That has been God this whole time.

And it is God who in this moment redirects your gaze and meditation back to him. It is God who points you to Himself in worship and Sacrament. Because that is what God does.

You are a child of God, fearfully and wonderfully made. Marked with the cross, the family name of Jesus, forever!!