

## **Baptism Promise 1: Of Who?**

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

### **Baptism Litany adapted from Isaiah 43**

**Pastor:** But now, this is what the Lord says

**All: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;**

**Pastor:** I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

**All: When you pass through the waters,**

**Pastor:** I will be with you;

**All: and when you pass through the rivers,**

**Pastor:** they will not sweep over you.

**All: When you walk through the fire,**

**Pastor:** you will not be burned;

**All: the flames will not set you ablaze.**

**Pastor:** For I am the Lord your God,

**All: the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;**

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

**All: Amen**

**Romans 6:1-4** What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup> Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

**Luke 3:15-23** <sup>15</sup> The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." <sup>18</sup> And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. <sup>19</sup> But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, <sup>20</sup> Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

<sup>21</sup> When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

<sup>23</sup> Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph,

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. -Luke 3:16*

**The Hoover family experienced an answered prayer this last summer. My brother’s daughter Atlee was Baptized.**

**She was Baptized in the same congregation where my brother and I had our first communion and confirmation. The congregation that sent me to Seminary and ordained me. Peace Lutheran Church in Pella, Ia.**

**The year before this Baptism the kids and I went to church with Isaac and Atlee. We let her pick the place to sit. She choose the front pew. During the sermon the pastor asked a rhetorical question and Atlee screamed out the answer from that front pew. And the rest is history... I had a good hunch at that point that God was doing something in Atlee’s life that would lead her to the Baptismal font.**

**She was going to be reborn, not because her dad wanted it to happen. If it was up to him she would not have it forced upon her, she would get to decide. Not because her uncle Kurt was a pastor, not even because her grandpa Hoover is also a Pastor. If it was up to us she would have been marked and sealed with that promise of the Holy Spirit soon after she was born.**

**No... It wasn’t our work, although there were many conversations. It wasn’t the people of the church inviting this single Dad in and making him feel welcome, although they did.**

**Nor was it Atlee finally getting to the age of accountability and deciding for herself that she wanted to be Baptized, although she did. Had declared her desire a couple years before in fact. (And this is one subtle point I will make about these conversations. Once a child or person declares the desire, even once to be Baptized, that is of the Holy Spirit. There is no need to ask again, or make sure they mean it. God has drawn out of them the first confession of faith in expressing that desire. Now there may be more conversations to get other involved or on board with what is happening in this child's life, but the process of salvation has already begun, the very first time a child express a desire for Baptism, no matter what age.)**

**Atlee was going to be reborn! And not of a Father's will, the churches' persuasion or even because she had pastors in her life. It was God that was making this moment happen, through countless prayers and conversations. Just as it was the Holy Spirit that gave her the courage to respond to the sermon. Atlee already had the Holy Spirit working on her and bringing her to the deep connection and mystery of God's outpouring of himself into us at Baptism.**

**So... how is it that you talk to your family and friends about Baptism? Raise your hand if you have had these conversations.**

**Here is the Hope that God instill in us today about His promise of Baptism for his children. You are going to have these conversations, you have all that you need right now to have these conversations and none of those conversations are going to go as you expect, because it is in the end God who brings a person to faith through His promise. He uses parents, and family, and the church and the pastor to do so. But it is all His work through us in surprising ways. All ages, every background, those close to him and those least prepared.**

**And this is possible because Baptism is not for the righteous who have come to faith. Baptism is the means by which faith is created. Baptism is often the first step on a life long connection with God. What connects us to God, by the very virtue of who God is, will not be our effort. What connects us to God will always come to us from the outside. And perhaps most powerful is the promise and declaration of Baptism. A moment God creates and a moment He will never go back on.**

**Child of God, I have called you by name, you are mine, with you I am well pleased!!**

**There were many conversations that led up to the Baptism of Atlee Hoover.**

**My favorite was a conversation between Myka and Atlee in the back seat of my mom's rental car as we were driving home from the school play (Little Shop of Horrors).**

**This was not the first time that Atlee and Myka had talked about Baptism. And here is the beauty of God's power to create his moment for others, through you. Once you bring up the topic of Baptism, it rarely goes away.**

**You already have everything you need to talk about Baptism. Because the most significant thing you have to say on the topic is this. 'Have you been Baptized?' or 'When will so and so be Baptized.' I truly believe that the moment that word is spoken about another human being the journey has begun. The seed has been planted. The child is almost certainly destined to be connected to God in the promise of Baptism.**

**This was not the first conversation. There were many conversations, many of them which I am sure felt awkward and nagging. And all of those conversations mattered. Each conversation that evoked the reaction of, ‘mind your own business.’ Each conversation out of love, that ended in silence lead up to this point. There were probably 3-4 conversations between two estranged parents on the topic. My brother talked with the current pastor of Peace Lutheran a couple of times. I know that Atlee’s daycare provider brought up the topic of church on a regular basis. Pella Iowa is a close nit community. I would not be surprised if my brother and Atlee, or Atlee and her mom talked with friends from community choir, soccer or school about Baptism.**

**How many licks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop? How many conversations does it take for God to get a child or an adult to the Baptismal font?**

**Countless. And they all matter. And God is using you to have those conversations in a world where just about every family has 2 or 3 cousins or friends. Teenagers and 4-year-olds who God is preparing for his promise. We are in a unique time, because of the Pandemic where there are going to be more than your average conversations about getting back to church and getting the kids Baptized. However, the conversations that lead to Baptism have been happening ever since John the Baptist declared the coming of a new kingdom that would save you from your sin. (Mat 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, John 1)**

***John 1:29 - <sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”***

**It takes many conversations. My favorite was a conversation between Myka and Atlee in the back seat of my mom's rental car as we were driving home from the school play.**

**Atlee choose Myka as her sponsor at her Baptism last summer. It is a neat connection they will have for the rest of their lives. And God used that relationship to make the moment of promise for Atlee happen. And here is the thing. At no point, at least I don't think so did Myka make it her personal goal to make sure Atlee is Baptized or have the conversation with her. Someone else asked the question. There were several conversations between Atlee and her dad. I think at least one of them went along the lines, of ... why does just about everyone else I know have this and I don't.**

**Myka didn't decide to have the conversation, not prepare what she was going to say. God made those conversations happen. And God gave my daughter the words to say, many of which I don't think either of us could recall. But words that God used to bring this child to Him.**

**So... how is it that you talk to your family and friends about Baptism?**

**Just say the word, ask the question that God has already been preparing your family and friends to deal with. Start the conversation that God scripted long ago.**

**God want's your family and friend to have the faith created by Baptism even more that you do. God is making these conversations happen.**

**There are 3 promises being made at the moment of Baptism that God creates. 2 of those promises are going to be broken and 1 of them is not.**

**There is the promise of the parents or individual themselves – We are going to go to church, we are going to pray, we are going to read the Bible, we are going to continue our instruction in the Christian faith. You may have had a moment of Baptismal surrender in you life where you have rewed these promises. You have said to God, I lost my way – from this point on my life will revolve around you once again.... This is a wonderful promise. Life-changing, but unsustainable. Impossible to keep. No one is perfect. God uses our promises to him, but it is not where the power of Baptism lies.**

**There is a promise made by the church. If not a clear request from the pastor at the time of Baptism. There is an implication that from the moment of Baptism the church will be there for you, to support and encourage you. Provide that worship that builds faith and instruction in the Christian Faith. In many ways your promise to be faithful to God in remembrance of your Baptism or at your Baptism doesn't have much meaning with out a community of faith in which to practice that faithfulness. This promise too is bound to be broken. There is no perfect church.**

**Thankfully there is a third promise being made.**

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. -Luke 3:16*

**God has placed a piece of himself in you and for that reason alone you are able to reason and love, sacrifice and believe.**

**There is a third promise in Baptism. The same promise that Jesus heard when the clouds split.**

*Child of God, I have called you by name, you are mine, with you I am well pleased!!*

**God has not, nor will he ever go back on that promise. This promise is not based on our or the churches promise. It is based on God's mercy shown in the loving sacrifice of the cross. Christ fulfilled this promise when he took your sin away from you and upon himself at the cross. Christ bears the sin and for that reason and that reason alone ... God says to you, right now!**

**Child of God, I have called you by name, you are mine, with you I am well pleased!!**

