

## **SERMON- Easter 7 (C)- Baptism**

**Charles R. Cowherd**

Acts 16:16-34

Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20-21

**St. Timothy's (Herndon)**

**June 1, 2025**

John 17:20-26

Psalms 97

### **OPENING:**

Today's sermon is the second of two parts.

Two weeks ago, I delivered PART ONE of the typical Baptismal Prep Session that I do with families in preparation for Baptism.

It was so glorious and spell-binding that I have to split it up in two parts.

That is, I got through some of the parts...

about showing this notebook of mine that lists all the baptisms I have ever done,

about the Parish Registry lists all the baptisms that St. Tim's has ever done,

about the Baptismal Candle (which you will get in a second),

and about the mighty Baptismal Certificate (which you will also get in a second).

But I left a lot on the table:

somehow, I was talking about baptism,

but never talked about the font or the water,

or what happens with communion after you get baptized.

Esme, you saved my bacon by coming today and standing before God and all of us and participating in this thing called Baptism.

Thank you so much.

### **FONT & SEASHELL & OIL**

Today something new happens, we baptize the newest member of God's church, making this young person the newest part of St. Timothy's.

But one of the questions that I ask in the Baptismal Prep sessions to the families is:

"what is the oldest thing in this church, this sanctuary?"

When answering, kids look around, sometimes they will say "grandma" but others will say the organ, and they are correct (1870!) but the second oldest thing is the baptismal font (1893, it cost \$75 for a marble works in Alexandria to make it.)

The font is OLD and so it connects us back to the baptisms,

decades and decades before today,

all the way back to the first one a little baby named Elsie, 7 months old in 1893.

The Font is OLD but the water is new

(It would be gross to have 150-year-old water in there)

Why water, why new water?

Water is beautiful, water is necessary for life, and we are all made up of water.

You drink it, we cook with it, we clean with it.  
With water in baptism, you get cleaned and washed... forever.  
I will ask, when I pour the water over you, if you want the sea-shell scoop and a little bit of water, or if you want me to really go for it and shovel with my hand. (Sometimes people even get baptized in a river, because they want a lot of water.) Either way works!

THEN, after the water, I will take this thing called a chrism, and open it up. It has oil in it, I will dab my finger on it and put a cross on your forehead and say some more words.  
So, in baptism, you get cleaned...  
...and then God seals the deal and makes you one of his own.  
No matter how old you get, you will still have that cross on your forehead. Even when you wash it off, or you cannot see it, or don't remember it...  
God can see it, God remembers, and God can see that you are one of his.

## **ASPERGELLIUM/ CERTIFICATE**

Okay so far, so good. Next prop.  
Water is great, but can be a little dangerous.  
That's why it is a good symbol because life is dangerous.  
When you get baptized and live a life of discipleship you have to step into the stirred water (recall last week's lesson).  
The stirred, boiling, roiling water is a symbol of the type of life that God calls us into.

On Palm Sunday, we reenact this, I take this thing out, it has a funny name, it's called an Aspergillum and it has water in it (but we won't do that today!) and we say "Remember your baptism!" and I flick it on people.  
That feels weird, and that's okay, it should feel weird. It's to remind everyone of our obligations and the promises that we make at our baptisms.  
Those promises can be kind of hard, because being a part of a family can be hard, being in a church can be hard, making these promises to love and to be loved.

Let me tell you a story:  
This is the baptismal certificate of Mike Maser of blessed memory.  
I had trouble getting along with Mike.  
Because Mike could be hard to get along with.  
One time Mike came into my office and presented me his baptismal certificate from way back when.

At first thought I was like “Thanks Mike...”... kind of annoyed at the interruption, but then I looked at it, and then I read it, and I thought about my own certificate, and all these other pieces of paper.

I checked in the book and Mike’s was recorded there,  
same water, same God, some faith, same baptism.

And I was reminded that Mike is in my family too,  
and God loves Mike and it's my job too also to love him and everyone.  
Because he and everyone have been cleansed by the same water as me.

### **PATEN & WAFER:**

Next one: Baptism is the start and not the end.

We are reminded of that because the font goes here, or even at the entrance to the church, because it marks your entry into this way of life,  
Some people remind themselves of that by, every time they walk into church, dipping their fingers into the water, and putting the cross on the forehead.

Now you only get one baptism.

(Or you are only supposed to, sometimes people tell me about their multiple baptisms and I close my eyes and put my hands over my ears.)

But because of your baptism, you are invited to receive Communion.

So, starting today, you will get to come to the rail, because you are a part of this family and share this meal, and that meal joins you to everyone at church, and joins you most importantly to God.

And you will take your hands out like this and you will receive the Bread (and the wine if you want!)

You get to do that whenever, for the rest of your life. That is amazing.

You will eat that bread, a big chunk and it will taste good but it also make you hungry... maybe not right away.... but eventually...

and your stomach

will remind your brain

and your soul

to remember your baptism.

Then you will come back again and again and eat the bread.

There are crazy people in this room, they come every week,

because their baptism means that much to them and they hunger for the bread

Some are even crazier than that, they are in this room too, they come even more

than that!

And so you can come back whenever you need it.

## **THE GATE**

Last one, and then we will get going.

Why this “gate,” why do we keep people in and out?

It's also called a “rail”

Sometimes it's called, in the Church, a “fence” and before Communion, if the Priest says something like “All Baptized Christians are invited to....” That's called “fencing the table.”

There are a lot of reasons to do that.

First we can admit that it's because the church, full of humans, likes to decide who is in and who is out. There are probably good arguments for saying: you don't need baptism to be able to receive communion (another sermon).

But here is why I think the gate/ the rail is a good idea:

The gate is good, because it tells you that what is happening behind it is holy.

In fact you might call it the “Holy of Holies,”

there is some sort of something going on when you cross that line,

there is sort of a nuclear reaction that is occurring,

that is so special, we have to mark it.

you have to wear the robe, you have to take some classes,

In some denominations, they don't even let you see it, there is a screen that goes up, so holy and precious is what takes place here.

A final reason, again purely function:

when you come forward as someone who is baptized,

the gate literally stops you in your tracks, reminding you of all that I just told you,

but you can depend on the gate, it supports you, it holds you up, it keeps you from falling to the floor, AND it connects you with all the other folks around it.

That, of course, is what baptism does also,

it gives you something you can depend on, something that supports you, something that connects you with all the folks all around you, and the God that knows and see you and loves you.

**AMEN**