

Series: Why Bother?
Why Bother with Baptism?
Sermon by Teaching Pastor Paul Joslin
Acts 8:36-39

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado
Sunday morning, August 18, 2024

Good morning. My name is Paulie. I go by Paulie around here, not to be confused with creative Paul, who you will hear later in the sermon today, but I was going to share with you just a piece of my story and my history with the church before we get to the reading. So, to understand me, you have to know my mother, since that is, after all, where I came from. I do not mean Carmenza Levitt. That is my mom. She is not who I am talking about today. I am talking about my mother, the church, and I apologize in advance if I offend you by saying something about your mother that I have experienced. I am talking about my mother today. So, my mother is a whore, Saint Augustine told me years ago. At least someone told me that Saint Augustine said that. They told me they heard that from their cousin, who heard it from their grandfather, who was there, I think, and saw her, and I believed them, because I have seen the way she acts. I believed them, even though I did not know what sex was or how desperate and hungry and worthless she might have been to decide to sell her body like that. I believed without wondering what Augustine knew of whores or mothers, but my mother either loved too much and smothered me with affection or demanded devotion and obedience. She put me and her other sons on pedestals, while her daughters were ignored, running around, cleaning up messes, carrying towels, worrying if she was okay. She fed me with her body. She shed her blood for me, and I would not be alive if not for her. She made my house a home and my people a family. I loved my mother, and I hated to see her cry, so I vowed I would make her proud of me. I would not want too much, think too much, or feel too much. I would become smaller, and I would not sin anymore, and I would never break her heart again, and if I succeeded for long enough, who knows? Maybe my Father would notice me and take me back with Him when He came back to get his things, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not stop myself, and she was impossible to please.

She also seemed like she was always trying to please somebody too, maybe afraid that they might leave for good instead of just going to the store for milk and honey. So, my mother never wanted me to leave. She gave me a village and a tribe. She gave me belonging, a double-edged sword, like my Father's words slicing between my joints and marrow, cutting without and within my soul and my spirit. She loved to hear me sing the family songs, and I loved the family songs too, so I would perform for all the family functions, Sunday dinners, vacations, weddings, funerals, reunions, pep rallies, and that was when all the old stories would come out, legends of our family's origins, our homeland, our exile, and even though it had all been written down in painstaking detail, I heard the stories so often that I started telling them, and I got good at telling them too. But then I started including my own observations about the stories, maybe a little bit here about what I thought was especially beautiful or ugly, but then I said too much, and I got tired of hiding the family secrets. Every family has secrets, and I shared my anger and my sadness and my humor and my love, and that does not really serve the purposes of good family propaganda, so as you can imagine, that caused fights with my mother. We needed to have what she called come-to-Jesus talks a lot, but more often I would just get the cold shoulder, or I would blow up and leave silently.

I was drawn to my other siblings, who were also tired of carrying the family's anxiety, and they were letting go of the hope of ever seeing Dad again, so they moved on, focusing more on how to find peace with the people they had here and the time they had left, and to be honest, I envy them. I would

even pretend to join them from time to time, but it was not in me. No matter how absurd it gets, I think I will always have room in my heart for holy ghosts and Jesus.

So, this is me, still calling my mom every week, taking her shopping, setting the table for her company, and singing the family songs, but it is different than before. I can leave now. I can go to my own place too, and when I return, I can bring my new self to old forms, which is what I think she really wants from me, because she really loves me, and she wants me to stay all the time, but she does not really want to force me. She knows I have to go away and grow up so that we can continue to have a relationship. She wants me to be her husband's son, the one who is not totally accepted in his hometown anymore, spending more time on the road, yet never leaving home, and this is my gift to her too. I have held her too much on a pedestal. I have kept her trapped under my gaze of contempt when she stubbornly clings to her addictions and idols, so adding a little distance between us helps me to see her beauty again and allows me to let go of the temptation to control her. I do not call her a whore anymore, but she still is my mother, and I want her to be happy. Being a parent myself, I see that I am a parent with everything I have received as a child, but I do not have to be my parents or stay committed to old loyalties or family stories. I can acknowledge how things have changed and how I have changed. I can listen without fear to my rabbi brother Jesus, who is pushing me to keep moving forward, keep going with Him into the unknown, reminding me of the old versions of myself I was crucified to, versions that were true but died and now need to be let go. He has been making a mother out of me the whole time, showing me how to give my body, how to give my blood, how to give my tears, and give my love and the family stories, secrets and all.

So here is this morning's reading. A reading from Acts 8:34 through 39: "The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about, himself, or someone else?' Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of me being baptized?' and he gave the orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went along his way rejoicing," the word of the Lord.

Paul: It takes a lot of vulnerability to share your story in such a creative way, and as you can tell, our nickname for him on staff, he is actually creative Paul, and they affectionately call me semi-creative Paul, which I think is a compliment, but I know that for some of you, the language in that might have felt a little intense, but if you have been on that side of the story with the church and what we are talking about in this series, why bother with church, dealing with spiritual abuse, the ways that church sometimes does not live up to our expectations, then I think you will resonate with what he shared today. In fact, Paulie shared that with our staff last year at staff retreat, and as we began preparing for this series, I thought I would just ask him if he would be willing to share again, because it so poignantly communicates what many of us have felt about the church at times, and sometimes it is helpful if someone else says the hard things out loud and gives voice to what we might be feeling.

So, thank you Paulie, for sharing that, and as we dive in today, before we get going with the message from Acts, I want to take just a moment and build off what Paul was just sharing and talk a little bit about Wednesdays at Waterstone. We have Wednesdays at Waterstone coming up on September 18. It is when classes and courses will kick off, and if you have not been at the church long, we have this rhythm every year where we go in the fall, so Wednesdays at Waterstone, where we gather together, we eat food together, and then we break off into classes. We have programming from kids all the way through adults,

from six o'clock to eight o'clock. It is a great night of community. If you are looking to meet new people, Wednesdays at Waterstone would be a great option for you, and I really encourage you to sign up.

This year we have two courses that I want to let you know about. One is a marriage course that is being taught and facilitated by Matt and Sarah Brennan. They are actually somewhere here today. Do you guys want to raise your hand? Yeah, right over there. I did not tell them I was going to make them raise their hands, but they are awesome. This is a phenomenal course for you to be a part of. If you are in a place in your marriage where you are maybe struggling and not quite sure what the next step is, or maybe you are in a great place, and you just want a refresher, they have some amazing material for conversation for you, and I am so excited about this class. We want to help to make the marriages of Waterstone strong.

The second one, and this is what builds off what Paulie was sharing today, is called, "Asking for a Friend," where we want to as a church, Waterstone, we always are willing to have hard conversations and talk about hard things. We want to be a church, and we think the church is healthiest when we agree to disagree on certain topics, when we have conversation instead of cancelling one another for disagreeing with us, where we look to Jesus first and foremost as what unifies us, and then the other things we can agree to disagree on, and so rather than this course really being something that's like, "Come and ask hard questions," it is a place where we are going to ask some hard questions and ask people to dialogue, sit at a table with someone you might disagree with, in order to have a good conversation and recognize that maybe we are not as different as we seem.

A couple of the questions we are going to be asking in this course are the following: "How do I love people I disagree with?" "Where is God when hard things happen?" "Who are you voting for?" Just kidding, sort of, all right? We just had to caveat that a little bit, and "What does the Bible say about women?" Those are just a couple of the questions that we are going to be asking, and not so much so that we can find the right answers. These are questions that the church has had a lot of opinions on throughout its history, and so we just want to come together and say, "What do you believe?" "What do you see in scripture?" and have a dialogue about it, so it is going to be a great fall. We would love for you to sign up and join us.

Here is the other thing you need to know. We're not going to be offering Wednesdays at Waterstone in the spring, and so if you're thinking, "I will just wait a couple of months, and then I can do it in February," it actually won't be available to you then. It is going to just become a fall rhythm for our church, and so we would love to have you sign up. If you have more questions about it, we have a table right outside, Wednesdays at Waterstone, and there will be some people there that can answer some questions for you. Sound good?

All right, so we are continuing with our series, "Why Bother with Church?" We have two weeks left in this series, and what I have to say is that over the last few weeks I have gotten so many e-mails from people and had conversations with so many people in the halls or down here after service, where unfortunately this series seems like it is really resonating with people, and I say unfortunately, because I think that means that a lot of us have stories of hurt and disappointment with the church, and so I am so thankful that we have been able to have this conversation together the last few weeks. With the two weeks we have left, we are going to make a little bit of a pivot in this series, and we are going to talk about two things that may not feel like they fit with where we have been in this series, but what we want to do today is talk about baptism, and what we are going to do next week is Larry is going to preach a sermon on communion, and here is why we decided to finish this series looking at those two things.

No matter what your church background is, we have a lot of people from a lot of different church backgrounds in this church. We have people who grew up Catholic or who grew up in different forms of Protestant denominations. No matter where you come from, if you have been to a church that is trying to follow Jesus, then these two practices, baptism and communion, although the modes or methods may be different, are still practices that are almost universal, engaged with by the church, and there is something about them that holds and binds the fabric of the church together, and so we want to just do an exploration of these two sacraments or ordinances, depending on your background, what you may have experienced in the past and just look at, “Why is it these two things that it bind the church together?” What we believe is that through the act of communion, receiving communion, we are proclaiming and remembering the death of Jesus Christ, his sacrifice on the cross for our sins and for the redemption of all things. Through baptism we believe that we are proclaiming the good news of his resurrection, that we believe in a God who brings dead things back to life, and so the next two weeks, that is what we are going to be looking at, but today we are diving into baptism, and so we are going to start at the end of the story today, Acts chapter 8, verse 36, if you want to follow along in your Bible.

“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water.’” Very good observational skills. He sees it, and then he names it. It is awesome. Then he says, “What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” which is an interesting way of phrasing that question, isn’t it? He does not say, “Can I get baptized?” “Will you baptize me?” He says, “Is there something about me that maybe would mean I could not be baptized in this moment?” This is an important question, and Philip apparently does not have anything to say about that. The eunuch just gives orders to stop the chariot, and then Philip, who was a disciple of Jesus, and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him, and when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Now I want you to just imagine for a moment this scene, okay? Two people are riding along in the chariot, and one is asking questions about scripture, and then the other person explains that to him, and then suddenly he asks if he can be baptized. They go for him to be baptized, and just imagine this scene. As he is coming up out of the water, suddenly the person baptizing him just disappears, is just completely gone. Can you imagine the silence and confusion at that moment? “What just happened? I was going about my day. I was just riding in my chariot. I encounter someone who starts talking to me about Jesus. He baptizes me, and then he is gone.” What in the world is going on in this story? It is such a bizarre ending to a story, and to answer what is going on in this story, we have to go back to the beginning, because I think that silence of the disappearance and I think the question that the eunuch is asking are deeply profound and answer something for us, not just about baptism, but actually give us a vision for what the church could potentially be.

So, to go back to the beginning, I need a little bit of help today from a few people in the audience who are going to be willing to come up on stage and help me tell the story. All right. Are you guys game? I just need two people, two brave souls who say, “I’m willing to come up and be on stage.” No hands are going up so far. Last night, I just, all right, Erin, come on up, and then I see another hand up there. I do not know who it is. All right, come on up, Crystal. Perfect. Thank you. You guys are so brave. Can you guys welcome Erin and Crystal up to the stage? So, as you guys come up, we are going to have, this is a chariot. Which one of you wants to be the eunuch, and which one of you wants to be Philip? All right, Crystal, why don’t you go ahead? You can have a seat there. You’re going to be in the chair, and then Erin, you can come over here for me, okay? All right.

So, what we are told as this story starts in Acts chapter 8 is that there is a eunuch who was riding in the chariot, and as he, perfect, that is exactly what we need from you, and this eunuch is wealthy, super rich. Can you show us what would rich look like? Oh, all right, I like it. Yes, showing off the bling. I like it. So, he is very wealthy, essentially the secretary of the treasury for the country of Ethiopia. That is who this eunuch is, a very wealthy person with a lot of power, who has been on a very long journey going, to Jerusalem so that he could worship at the temple. Can you show us what it looks like to worship? Oh, wow, okay. She has worshipped before. That is perfect. All right, so this is the scene that is playing out. As this is happening, we are told that an angel of the Lord comes to Philip and tells Philip to go on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, and so God says, "Philip, go on to the road." So, Philip walks onto the road, and as he walks onto the road and begins journeying, he sees the eunuch, who is riding in a chariot and bumping along, and so what happens is Philip goes along, and God literally tells him, "Go catch up with that chariot," so Philip is running alongside the chariot, trying to keep pace with the chariot. Who in the world can run as fast as a horse? I do not know, but Phillip is doing that, and then this conversation begins to play out. You guys have your, oh wrong one. You are the eunuch, and then Phillip. All right, so this is the thing. You guys are going to have to project so people can hear you a little bit.

"What's that you're reading?" "The prophet Isaiah." "That is a good one. Do you understand what you are reading?" "How can I unless someone explains it?" and scene. Perfect. Can you guys give it up for Erin and Crystal? Awesome. All right, thank you guys so much. All right, that is not really the end of the scene, but I have to talk a little bit now to explain what we just witnessed, all right? So, this is the conversation that is playing out. The eunuch is reading from the prophet Isaiah, and Philip is like, "Do you understand anything that you are reading?" The eunuch essentially says, like, "No way. How could I understand what I am reading if there is not someone here who could explain it to me?" and what I love about this scene is that as all of this is playing out, this is what the eunuch's response is when he is asking these questions. It is in verse 31. It says, "How can I unless someone explains it to me?" and then he invited Philip to come and sit with him." He just invited him into the chariot to sit with him and have a conversation.

Now, have you ever been in a situation in your life where you were reading something in scripture, and you had no idea what it was talking about? Yeah. Have you ever had a moment in your life where something was going on in your life where what you knew about God or what you thought you knew about God does not align with what you have experienced, so you have been left in a place of confusion and questioning and doubt? That is the eunuch on this road. Something happened to him in Jerusalem where he is confused about who God is and what he is doing in the world and what his place is in it, and so God miraculously sends Philip. He says, "Go jump on this road and run next to a chariot, and I want you to have a conversation with this person who is confused and lost and questioning," and what I love about this scenario is that he just comes, and he just sits. He comes alongside the eunuch, and he sits with him. He just sits, and they have a conversation.

One of my favorite moments in ministry happened earlier this year, when I got an e-mail from someone in the church, a mom who said that her nine-year-old son had a lot of questions about faith and scripture and the Bible, and he was wondering if I would be willing to sit down with him so he could ask me these questions, and I kid you not, it was one of the best conversations, forty-five minutes of this kid just grilling me with all sorts of questions, questions like this, "How did God and dinosaurs coexist at the same time?" "What is up with all the gods in the world, like the Greek gods or the gods in the Bible? How are they all coexisting together?" and this was a really good one, "How was Jesus actually a kid and God,"

which is a really good question when you are nine years old, right? Like, amazing, and so we just sat on my couch, and he just grilled me with question after question after question, and here is what I loved about that moment. I lit up with joy when I received that e-mail from that mom, because I had a lot of questions when I was a kid, and when I would ask questions about scripture, I would say things like, “So why did the flood happen, and why did God kill everyone?” and then my teachers would say, “That is not really a question we deal with in Sunday school,” so you should not ask that, right?

You have probably had those experiences, too. Sometimes people do not want questions in the church, because they do not know the answers to those questions, and so they respond by saying, “That question is not really something we deal with here.” Sometimes some of you have asked questions of a church or people in authority in a church, and it has felt to them like you are pushing against their authority or their knowledge or what makes them comfortable, and so they may say something like, “That kind of question does not belong here.” We have had those kinds of experiences within the church, but not Philip. Philip just sits with him. He is not threatened by the questions. He is not worried about the person not understanding. He just sits with him and comes alongside him, and this, I think, gives us a vision for what the church could potentially be.

Imagine with me if the church became the place where we learned to sit with people in their struggles. What if the church became a place that rather than condemning people for having doubts or struggles or wrestling, or coming to scripture and not understanding, what if we became a place that rather than condemning those things or saying, “Those things don’t belong here, you need to go somewhere else for that,” what if we said, “This is the place where we struggle, we wrestle, we sit with one another when we do not understand what God is doing in the world”? That is an image of church that I think would ignite people to come to church, to experience God rather than feeling like maybe they are somehow excluded. What if our posture shifted around questions and doubt from one of defense to one of openness and receptivity?

So, the eunuch invites Philip to sit with him, and this is the passage that he was reading that was confusing the eunuch, we are told in verses 32 through 34: “‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as the lamb before its shearers is silent, so He did not open his mouth, and in his humiliation, He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants, for his life was taken from the earth?’ The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about, himself, or someone else?’” There is something behind the eunuch’s question here where he is trying to understand what this passage is really about. I think with that question, it is important to give you some of the back story of who the eunuch was and why he might be asking this question about this particular passage.

Now I am going to assume for the sake of today and not having to go into too much detail that you know what a eunuch is, all right, and if you do not, you can just ask your neighbor. It will be an awkward conversation, but I am pretty sure they can help you out. In that day, eunuchs, we do not know if they got to choose that life or if that life was chosen for them, but some time before puberty, they often experienced surgery that changed their anatomy, and when that happened, it caused severe hormonal changes to who they were, because they were supposed to step into a particular role within the society that they were a part of. Oftentimes it would be some sort of role within the royal palace, where they would not have to worry about them engaging with other people in the royal family and in other types of dynasties. So, it was a political move, so this is the eunuch’s background, something that he has grown up with since he was a young boy. We do not know if it was chosen for him, or if he chose this path, but the other thing we know about him from this story is that he had traveled from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh,

and so, even though he is a Gentile and a eunuch, he is wanting to worship the one true God, and he has actually traveled over 1,500 miles, most likely, a five-month journey to try to get to the temple, so he could encounter God's presence and worship God at the temple. That is an incredibly long trip. This was an investment he made, but it is likely that he was not just going so that he could worship at the temple. It is likely that he was hoping to convert to Judaism, and the way that that would happen is that a Gentile in that day would go to the temple, and they would go through several ceremonies. One of them was a baptismal ceremony, where they would be washed ceremonially clean, and they could then convert to Judaism, and so that is probably why this eunuch has gone all the way through this trouble. He wants to be included in the family of God. He wants to go to the place where he can encounter God's presence, become a member of the family, and experience life with God and community.

If only the eunuch had a copy of the scroll of Deuteronomy and not Isaiah, because in Deuteronomy it makes it really, explicitly clear that eunuchs are not allowed to participate in temple worship, and in fact they are forbidden from entering the gates of the temple, and so you have to imagine for this eunuch, he has gone on this massively long journey, hoping to come and worship and encounter and become a part of the family of God, and he is turned away at the gates, and what he is essentially told is, "You are not welcome here, because of what you have done or what has been done to you. You do not belong in this community." You have to imagine for this eunuch in this moment that it was not just that the community was rejecting him. It was that God Himself was rejecting him, that if he is journeying to the place where God's presence dwells and where he is hoping to encounter the presence of God and become a part of the family, to be turned away at the gates is not just a rejection of the community. It is essentially saying that there is something about you that God does not want, and so he turns around to start the journey home.

Some of you have had an experience like the eunuch, where maybe it was questions and wrestling and doubts, or maybe there is something that happened to you, or maybe something in your past that you have done, and the message you have received from the church is that that is not welcome here. "That is too much for us. You are not allowed to be a part of the family of God if that is in your background," and you carry that wound of questioning and wondering, "Maybe it is not just the church or the people of God who do not want me. Maybe it is God Himself who doesn't want me. Maybe there is something about me that is too much, that God could never actually want." You know the experience of the eunuch. He is just trying to look for a place in God's story, and he is told that there is no part for him there, and so when he asks this question and when he is reading this passage, I want you to read with me this passage again that he is studying, and I want you to read it through the eyes of the eunuch.

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, He was deprived of justice, and who could speak of his descendants, for his life was taken from the Earth?" Do you see the parallels to someone who has been on his journey, rejected, humiliated, taken before a group of people to have been cut like a lamb before the slaughter? When he asks Philip, "Who is this story about?" I think you can hear the hope in his voice that maybe, just maybe, if there is someone in scripture who is like me, then maybe it does not mean that God does not want me, because if there is someone's story in scripture that is like my story, if there is someone in scripture who identifies with me, then just maybe I have a place in God's story too." That is his question.

So, he is saying, "Is it about the prophet? Is it about the person, or is it about someone else? Who is this about, that I so easily identify with? Who is it about that looks so much like me?" and I love Phillip's response to this question. In verse 35 it says this, "Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." Philip started with this passage and began explaining to him,

“You are right, it is not about the prophet. It is about someone else, and there is someone, his name is Jesus. I knew him. I was one of his disciples, and I followed Him, and I watched as He encountered different people who had been told their whole lives that they did not belong in the community of God, and I watched Him heal those people, and I watched Him bring God’s presence to those people, and I watched Him encounter those people with love and compassion and truth, and then the people rejected Him, and they led Him like a lamb to the slaughter, and then I witnessed, as He remained silent before his accusers, I witnessed him deprived of justice. I watched Him die and be murdered on a cross, but the good news is the story did not end there. He went through all of that to open the floodgates, so people like you could come into the presence of God and be in the family of God. That is the good news of Jesus,” and I think it gives us another vision of what the church could be.

Imagine with me for a moment that the good news of who Jesus was, the good news the church has, were actually good news to the world. Sometimes I think we get it a little bit backwards. I think sometimes we think, “Yeah, it is good news, but it is good news for all of us, because we are on the inside, and we have experienced it. We have encountered it, and so yeah, this is good news. Hurrah. Jesus loves me,” but when it comes to people outside the walls of the church, when it comes to the good news being proclaimed to the world, oftentimes what we tell them is, “Before you can be accepted, there are things about your story or who you are that have to change, in order for the church to welcome you in. There are certain things about you that have to be different, in order for Jesus Christ to accept you as you are. You need to change, and then you can come into the presence.” That is not good news. The good news that Philip gave to the eunuch in this moment was that it does not matter what you have done. It does not matter what has been done to you. Because of Jesus and who He is, all are now welcome in the family of God. What if the church were a place where the good news of Jesus Christ actually sounded like good news to the world?

In verse 36, after he has received the good news, it says this, “As they were traveling along the road, they came to water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?’” Now, do you hear the question behind the question? He had just been to the place where people were supposed to be able to encounter God’s presence and become a part of the family of God, and he had been turned away, but now he has been told the good news of Jesus, and he is wondering, “How far does the good news of Jesus actually extend? Can someone like me, with my background, with my story, with my struggles, can someone like me be baptized and have full inclusion in the kingdom of God?” That is the question behind the question. “Am I someone who can be baptized? Is Jesus enough for me?”

You have to imagine, I would love to know how long that question hung in the air, because for Phillip, he was a good Jew. He understood all the rules. He had the book of Deuteronomy. He knew the regulations and who was in and who was out and who was allowed and who was not, and any other day, you have to imagine that earlier in his journey, if Phillip encountered someone like the eunuch, he could have looked at his ethnicity or his gender or his story and said, “Sorry, nope, this is where the line is drawn,” but God has done something in Philip’s own life where he does not have any objection to this idea, and he simply gets out of the way, because I think there was something about Philip that remembered, after all of his time with Jesus, that what is offensive about the gospel is not who it keeps out, but who it lets in. That is the offense of the gospel, that because of what Jesus has done, there is nothing any of us have to do to enter into relationship with Him, because He has done everything. He has done everything.

I think sometimes we get this inverted a little bit too. I think sometimes we think, and we are well intended in these thoughts, that people need to clean up their act a little bit. They need to change this or that in order to be welcomed in, and we have these conversations with people where we look at their past or their stories or the things that they have done, and we say, “Grace is really good, but in order to experience grace, you need to come a little bit further. You need to start changing some of the things about yourself, and then you can experience what it is like to be in community,” but that inverts the equation. It always starts with the grace and mercy of God. Grace is nothing that we earn, and of course, after we receive that grace, change and transformation begin to take place, but it does not start there.

So, what if the church were a place where everyone felt safe, but no one ever felt comfortable, where every single one of us knew when we walked through those doors or when we went to a community group, or when we came to a Wednesday at Waterstone, we were safe, because the body of Christ is a place where all people are welcomed to come, no matter their struggles, no matter their questions, no matter their doubts, no matter what they have been through or what they have chosen to do, or no matter what has happened to them, this was a place that they would be safe, but not a single one of us would be comfortable, because the grace of Jesus Christ is so strong and so profound that it never leaves us the same, and it always brings us into new life and transformation, because that is what baptism is?

It is the proclamation that Christ died and rose again so that He can bring us to new life, and so that we can experience the power of his resurrection in our lives today, and that begins the journey of transformation and change and growth. That is the beauty of the gospel, so imagine if we were a place where everyone felt safe, but no one felt comfortable. The question is, how do we respond to this story? What do we do with this story? To be honest with you, there is only one way I know how to finish it, and that is with baptism, because baptism is the proclamation that what Jesus has done on the cross is enough for us, that it is nothing we have to do, nothing we have to earn, that simply the proclamation that Jesus is enough, and that when we give our allegiance to Him, He begins the work of transformation and renewal as we partner with Him.

It felt really disingenuous for me to preach this text where they see a body of water, we do not know what the body of water was. It could have been a puddle on the side of the road. It could have been a stream, it could have been, we have no idea, but they just see water, and they are like, “Let’s do it. Let’s get baptized.” It felt so disingenuous for me to say, “Hey, you may want to get baptized now after us talking about baptism. Come back to our baptism meeting on November 3. That is the next time we meet.” Like that just does not work, and so what we did last night and what we are doing today is we have open baptism, that if you are here today, and you would like to receive baptism, and if you are in a place in your life where you have given your life to Jesus and have never been baptized before, and you want to respond with the act of baptism today and receive that grace and that mercy, then after this last song, we are going to baptize anyone who wants to get baptized if they can answer these two questions, “Do you believe that Christ has died and rose again for your sins?” and, “Do you plan to follow Him for the rest of your days?”

Last night we spontaneously baptized three people who had never been baptized before. It was incredible. It was beautiful. It was so awesome, and we do not do this a lot at Waterstone. Usually, we are a good Baptist church, and we have a baptism class, where you come, and we talk about it, and we make sure you get all the right answers, and then we do it, but it felt so disingenuous to go through those steps today, and so if you would like to be baptized, I will be down here later. We will be down here. Some of our other staff will have a lanyard on, and we will have a conversation with you, and then after this song, you can be baptized.

This is one last quote that I would like to share with you about baptism, to wrap up this moment with you. “Baptism reminds us that there is no ladder to holiness to climb, no self-improvement plan to follow. It is just death and resurrection, over and over again, day after day, as God reaches down into our deepest graves and with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, wrests us from our pride, our apathy, our fear, our prejudice, our anger, our hurt, and our despair.” As we begin worshiping together, if you would like to be baptized today, all you have to do is come forward. We will have a conversation with you, and then after the song, we will baptize you. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, God, if there is anyone in the room today who has felt maybe a prompting from your Spirit, God, that their story resembles the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, someone who was on the outside and maybe did not feel like they were included in the family of God, and I pray that the truth of your word, the goodness of your gospel, the good news about who Jesus is would seep into their souls today, and that they could respond in newness of life to you. It is in Christ’s name that we pray, amen.

41:49 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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