Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Saying "Hi" – Week 24

Greeting Jesus

Day 161: Baptism

What do you want me to learn about baptism?

Let's start with the question of 'why do you want to be baptised?'

I don't know. It sounds like a strange initiation rite.

It's not so much a rite of initiation as it is a rite of acceptance.

Acceptance by who? Acceptance for what?

Acceptance by you. Actually, maybe recognition and resignation may be even better.

Recognition of what? Resignation to what?

In undertaking baptism, you recognize that,

a.) God the Father created you in His love, knowing that in creating you, He was improving His creation. He created you to represent Him in it.
b.) In your selfishness and sin, in your desire for self-determination, you (we all) chose paths of death, of darkness, of broken-ness and harm.
c.) So, rather than improving creation, you harmed it. In your refusal to represent the Father, you end up destroying what He has gifted you with.
What did He "gift" me with (gee you speak weird sometimes)?
He gave you the great gift of life – your own life, and then He gave you the gift of having power over much of the other life on the earth. In your greed and insecurity, you destroy rather than nurture that life, and you also destroy your own life.
d.) Recognizing the above, you have come to the resignation that you are unable to resolve this on your own and need God's ongoing guidance.

Ok, I need His guidance, maybe – but I still get to choose.

You always have the power to choose. However, in being baptised you are choosing that God's way is the healthiest of ways, and you want to pursue God's way, to always choose what is healthiest (most loving) and most pleasing to God, as much as you can.

What if I choose otherwise?

Then you betray your baptism. Remember Day 151?

Yes.

If you truly wish to be baptized, then you are saying you wish to permanently live in God's Country, the Kingdom of God, as part of the Community of Christ.

I see.

And you surrender yourself to living under God's instruction, God's will, Gods' desires – not your own. In love. You may even find that you end up aligning your desires with God's.

Why?

Because ultimately, you realize that will give God pleasure – and you love God.

Explain how you give God pleasure.

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 162: Understanding

So, if I wish to please God because I love God … I should be baptised? What exactly is baptism doing that is so important?

As recounted on page 146 of the Anglican Book of Alternative Services:
"Baptism is participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6.3–5; Colossians 2.12); a washing away of sin (1 Corinthians 6.11); a new birth (John 3.5); an enlightenment by Christ (Ephesians 5.14); a reclothing in Christ (Galatians 3.27); a renewal by the Spirit (Titus 3.5); the experience of salvation from the flood (1 Peter 3.20–21); an exodus from bondage (1 Corinthians 10.1–2) and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division, whether of sex or race or social status, are transcended (Galatians 3.27–28; 1 Corinthians 12:13). *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982, Faith and Order Paper No. 111*."

Let's stop at the first point. I die?

☺ Please review day 50 as it describes it well. You die to yourself and are reborn in Christ. Your old way of living is dead, and you are starting a new, open-ended, life in which everything you do and say is focussed on loving and pleasing God. You look at life through Christ's eyes, you reach out with Christ's hands, you feel with His heart and think with His mind.

What if I don't know Him enough to do that?

All of us are learning, more and more. This is why we read our bible, why we pray, why we gather together for learning and sharing. Our exploration is ongoing and never-ending, always richer and more encompassing.

So, because I love God, I wish to die to myself and start a new life in which everything I do pleases Him? Basically, live for Him?

Exactly. That's the first part.

Describe your day if everything you thought, said, and did – pleased God.

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 163: The second part

I tried to imagine a day in which everything I did pleased God, and it seemed to be the most boring day I could imagine!

Why?

I spent half of it reading the bible, ¼ of it praying, and ¼ going around and doing random acts of kindness. I was bored of reading after 30 minutes, of praying after 10, and couldn't think of any random acts of kindness to do!

This brings us to the second part – were you thinking of baptism as a solitary act?

I think that's what you've implied…

I apologize then. It's actually 3-way: you, God, and the community.

The community?

The community of Christ. The church. The second part of baptism is that you join with all those who have previously been baptised – all those who have died to themselves and committed to following Christ as fully as they can.

I've heard that church is boring.

What gives you joy?

A sense of accomplishment. A sense of overcoming something that's bigger than I am. Climbing a mountain may give me joy, or swimming down to a coral reef, or building a business … or reading a book I've always wanted to finish … something that I can do which I hadn't previously been able to, for whatever reason.

How about transforming the entire world, one person at a time, from evil, death, and despair, to life, love, and caring? How about providing health instead of death? How about opening people's minds to the reality that God is with them, right here and right now? How about pursuing something so huge that it's been in progress since humanity has been created, and may be in progress for millennia more?

Become part of God's transforming plan?

Exactly! Pursuing full and open relationship with Jesus until we finally get the realization of "The residence of God is among human beings. He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist any more—or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist."

How?

Reading the bible, praying, and random acts of kindness are all good disciplines – but the full vision won't be realized until in community with others you are doing practical things to change the world as per God's will. Until you are struggling in the places where there is hardship, and despair, and anger. Until you are bringing God into those places – and inviting Jesus to place His hand in to the hands of those in need. And then, possibly, being His hand for them. These cannot be solitary acts but must be done in partnership with the other baptized whom God surrounds you with. These are acts which often require sacrifice.

What are your thoughts regarding day 163?

Share your answers with others whom you trust

Day 164: Joy

So, there is my part, and God's part, and the community part – and the end result is the transformation of the universe?

Yes. And why does God want the universe transformed?

So He can be fully in control?

No! God doesn't care about control – if He did, He would have created us as robots.

What then?

So we can know joy.

Joy?

Yes, joy – perhaps the greatest of all God's creations.

The boredom and the self-sacrifice and the pain lead to joy?

If you are pursuing God's ends and God's will and are striving to learn about God's ways to be a transforming influence in God's universe, you will not be bored much. You will have to sacrifice. You will probably encounter pain, because pain is encountered when something is wrong – and there is lots wrong. You will embody love and discover joy.

How?

As you do God's will, you will begin to sense God's gratitude for the health and wellness you are introducing into His creation – and that gratitude will come to you as joy. Paradoxically, it can come in times of great pain or sadness – joy is not equated with happiness. Joy is beyond happiness.

I see. I think that's why I want to be baptised.

Why?

Because I want joy.

Describe joy.

Share your description with others whom you trust.

Day 165: Joy

What is it like living with joy?

The first thing to emphasize is that joy does not mean trouble-free, or even happy. Joy often comes after struggle. For a good understanding of joy, let's look at the earthly life of Jesus, this time from the Gospel of Mark:

1.) When we are introduced to Jesus, the Father is announcing: "You are my one dear Son; in you I take great delight."
2.) Next, Jesus is in the wilderness, enduring temptations.
3.) Then, Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed the gospel of God. He said, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel!"
4.) Jesus called others to join Him.
5.) Jesus taught, and Jesus healed.
6.) Then Jesus got up early in the morning when it was still very dark, departed, and went out to a deserted place, and there he spent time in prayer.
7.) He encountered resistance and conflict, and He addressed it head on. Points 5, 6, and 7 are much of the rest of the Gospel of Mark.
8.) The conflict grew to a point where Jesus was killed.

Some key lessons:

1.) Know your identity. When you are baptised, God is saying to you, ***"You are my dear child – in you I take great delight."*** It is important that you know this as your identity – **no matter what you do or don't do, no matter what your life eventually involves, your identity is that of a dear child of God, one in whom God is delighted.** Just as Jesus knew His identity, so do you. Be resigned to it.
2.) Expect temptation and struggles. We will face temptations and times where we feel (or are) totally alone. We must endure these resting firm in our identity and the purpose that God has developed for us.
3.) Be on your mission! Do not say you are too young or too old, too ignorant, or unworthy – God has given you your mission. There is no waiting around – Jesus was immediately on His mission, and so are you. He came to call people to the kingdom of God, and so are you. *How* you do that may be very specific to you, but that is your mission. It is urgent! It could mean life or death to the next person you encounter.
4.) We join with Jesus, and we work in community. Work with others – you are much more effective than when working alone. Hermits, while they do occur, are a relative rarity in Christianity.
5.) Jesus acted on the mission He was given. This is where the joy starts. Witnessing people being healed, whether physically, emotionally, relationally, spiritually – Jesus healed in every way, and so are we to. Teaching people about the love God has for them, and how they can live in that love, and seeing them change from despair to hope, from hatred (usually self-hatred) to love – it gives great joy.
6.) Jesus spent time to re-connect with His Father, and so must you – so must we all. Continually re-connect with God to re-affirm your identity and your (and our) mission.

7.) Expect resistance and do not be afraid of it.
8.) As we know, even being killed did not stop Jesus – He rose again and lives with us still. Know that nothing will stop your mission and the joy of releasing people from bondage to despair and (self) hatred into hope and love, into joy, even your very death cannot stop it.

Describe when you have encountered joy. Describe how you would imagine the joy of God over you healing wounded people into His kingdom.

Share your thoughts with others whom you trust.

Day 166: Personal Relationship

There's one more key aspect of baptism that we really haven't touched on.

What's that?

In baptism, we believe you are immersed in the very Spirit of God Almighty – totally flooded with it (again, what you actually feel is totally irrelevant).

Neat! And, scary…

Baptism is you accepting, recognizing, and being resigned to the fact that in the Holy Spirit, you and Christ are one, just as He and the Father are one.

In baptism, Christ says "Hi?"

In baptism, Christ says, "Hi!", then walks in and takes up residence within you. Through baptism, you become a vital part of the great Temple of Christ, wherein He dwells.

That sounds important.

After baptism, you are embarked on a new life in which you no longer belong to yourself, you belong to Christ. Everything you have belongs to Christ. Everything you are belongs to Christ. Your body, your soul, your riches, your fame, your power – everything. He is your Master, your Lord, your Everything. In baptism, you are saying to Jesus the Christ, "Please, take over. All this, all that I have, is yours."

So I become a robot?

Ironically, because God loves you so much, if anything you become the most free you can be. God does not desire to take over. Instead, He desires to walk with you – with a you which is free from fear of death, fear of evil, fear of being hurt, fear of anything – and is only filled with the certainty of the love of God and the joy that comes from the gratitude which God has towards you. Hopefully, that freedom, that certainty, and that joy help to propel your explorations into ever-increasing levels of love, love not as the world thinks of it (often acting as a cover for narcissism or selfishness), but rather love as God thinks of it – true life, true health, *shalom.* In Christ, through Christ, with Christ, of Christ. That, my friend, is true transformation. Baptism is transformation, transformation to a real relationship with Christ.

Describe your relationship with Christ. How could it be better – what exploring could you do?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 167: Rest

We come again to the seventh day, so today we rest. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you.