

Something to Pray About

April 2013 – Cindy Sears

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. —Galatians 3:27 NKJV

Baptism into New Life

“Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The Baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.” --p.61, Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1996.

In the Great Commission, we are called to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” Matthew 28:19. The disciples of Jesus baptized people while Jesus was on earth, but that was simply a “baptism of repentance” (see John 3:22 and 4:1-2). This baptism was similar to that which John the Baptist was doing (see Matthew 3:1-11). But after Jesus died for our sins, was resurrected, and returned to heaven to be with the Father, baptism took on new symbolism and power.

Repentance remains an important aspect of baptism. In Acts 2:38 we read,

“Repent,” Peter said to them, “and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

But now it is also tied with the name of Jesus and with the giving of the Holy Spirit, which seals us into the family of God. A baptism of repentance only was not enough anymore. One had to be baptized in Jesus’ name (see Acts 19:1-7). Why? Because through Jesus we are justified, and no longer under condemnation (see Romans 8:1).

Baptism was also usually performed immediately after belief in Jesus was expressed. See Acts 8:36-38; 9:17-18. (Is this why we have pouring and sprinkling as forms of baptism, because a body of water was not always available for immersion?) Sometimes the Holy Spirit arrived first, though. See Acts 10:44-48. So, baptism is not required as a means to be given the Holy Spirit. Whole households were baptized into the faith when the head of the household expressed belief. See Acts 16:13-15 (Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth); 16:29-34 (jailer’s whole household baptized); 18:8 (leader of the synagogue, Crispus, and his whole household believed and were baptized). This is one reason why the Methodist Church retains baptism of infants. Following is an excerpt from the Book of Discipline on the matter:

“Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and incorporation into the body of Christ. An infant, child, or adult who is baptized becomes a member of the catholic (universal) church, of the denomination, and a baptized member of the local congregation...Baptized infants and children are to be instructed and nurtured in the meaning of the faith, the rights and responsibilities of their baptism and in spiritual and moral formation...youth will profess their faith, commit themselves to a life of discipleship and be confirmed. Confirmation is both a human act of commitment and the gracious action of the Holy Spirit strengthening and empowering discipleship.” –p. 125, Book of Discipline, 1996.

Another reason we include children in baptism is because Jesus explicitly included the children in his kingdom (see Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16—recorded three times, a sign of the importance of this statement to the early church). Many theologians believe that all children who did not live to the “age of accountability” on this earth will be in heaven. And we do not know what that age is or if it is different for different people.

But what does baptism really mean? In Romans 6:3-4, Paul tells us that when we are baptized we



Kaylee's baptism on July 28, 2013

are buried with Christ Jesus in His death, and raised to new life in Him. We are no longer under sin's dominion! (see Romans 6:6). We have now “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). We now live in Christ as if we had never sinned (Colossians 2:11-14). This symbolism of the new life in Christ is especially visible in baptism by immersion. As one is lowered into the water, death to the old way of life is symbolized. As we are lifted back out of the water, resurrection into the new way of life in Christ is shown to us. This physical manifestation of the eternal, spiritual truth prepares us body and soul and mind for our new way of living. We are now bound to righteousness, and no longer bound to sinfulness.

We are baptized into one body. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” There is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:4), which is why the Methodist Church accepts the baptisms of people who join UMC from other Christian denominations.

“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” The believer has died in Christ, is raised to new life in Christ, and will be called by Christ to eternal life in heaven at His second coming. Praise be to our all merciful and gracious King of King and Lord of Lords! Amen.