



*The
Beauty of Baptism*



A great woman, Forest Gump's mother once said, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You just never know what you're going to get."

I pale in comparison to the mother of Forest Gump but I say, "life is kind of like an airport, & we should make the most of the time we have."

I just got back from a trip to the Bahamas. My whole family was there and my father-in-law, a very generous man, paid for the entirety of the trip.

I wasn't his son by birth. I married his daughter. And yet he now treats me like his own. I've been grafted into his family and I get to experience his kindness and generosity as Jennifer has her whole life.

And we didn't drive to the Bahamas we flew. And that means we spent time in some airports, first in Dallas, then in Atlanta, and then in the Bahamas.

While we were in the Atlanta airport I began to realize that life is kind of like an airport. There are departures and arrivals.

In this world there are arrivals. Babies come into the world. They arrive. And families rejoice when they see them.

And in airports there are also departures. Sometimes these are sad. I've been walking through the valley of the shadow of death with my dad. And at times it's been terrifying. We found out a couple of weeks ago he had bladder cancer. And then once we got him to Houston we found out his cancer is aggressive, rare and that it was the kind that tries to spread. It was in the muscle wall of his bladder, which isn't where you hope it is if you have to have it. And we had to wait days until we knew if it spread. The days felt like years. I've never prayed so hard, with so much fear, and have never searched the scriptures for answers like I did during those days. And they tell you not to think the worst but the news they had given us wasn't good. My dad began to prepare in some measure for his departure from the airport. He began to speak about it and we would try and silence him and then we would pour out our hearts to God about it all. Eventually, when we heard these words, "his cancer is contained and curable," we rejoiced like we never have before. Those were sweet words. And yet, now my soul has been singed. I will never be the same because of this experience. I don't want to be. I feel more compassion and empathy than ever for the people that may never get to hear the words, "curable and contained." I now know how scared they are. If I didn't before I now know the fear of a departure from the airport.

And yet there is joy for those that depart. Even as our hearts ache because we will miss those that board their planes, when we know our loved ones are departing on their plane for the heavenly city where Jesus is king, it's hard to be entirely sad.

At the airport in Atlanta I ate Chipotle. It's one of my favorite spots. I had to choose between 5 guys burgers, wolf gang puck and chipotle and was beside myself with those good options. And I loved watching my kids joy rise with expectation as our vacation literally began in the airport.



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There was food at the airport. Relationship. Waiting and rest. Some people were working. And it was clear that airports are always making progress. They are always being upgraded, just like our planet is constantly being upgraded in a lot of ways.

And our flight was full. The stewardess kept saying, "please gate check any large bags because the storage areas are going to be tight."

It occurred to me. We are all departing soon. And when our pilot, the Lord Jesus comes to get us, we won't be able to take our stuff with us. Our houses won't board the plane. Our cars won't. Our wardrobe won't. Our bank accounts won't. Our furniture will stay. Everything will stay. He's simply coming to get us. And it felt more foolish than ever to accumulate things to store up here on earth. It felt as foolish as it would be to take all your things to an airport, knowing they are only going to let you take 2 carry on items on the plane.

And then I realized that God the father is like my father-in-law. He is generous. He sent his son to pay for our flight. Our departures and our permanent eternal vacation stay was paid in full by the blood of Jesus. We all use his frequent flyer miles to get where we are going and his blood provided an unlimited amount of those frequent flier miles. No one that wants to board his plane will be excluded. All those that love God's son have a free flight and future that awaits. There is no first class or business class, just coach seats. Every seat is the same and every seat was not earned by anyone but God's son.

And the truth is we aren't born into God's family anymore than I was born into Jennifer's family. The Bible makes it clear that God has offered us the chance through a marriage to be his children. Through a spiritual marriage to his son all of us can join the royal family and be co-heirs with the Lord Jesus.

So friends life is like an airport. Make the most of the time you have. Your departure date isn't certain but the fact that you will one-day board a plane is certain. The only question is will you board the plane God's son will be piloting or will you board one destined to crash? I think the choice is a no-brainer. Make sure you've told Jesus that you want to one-day fly the friendly skies with him.

So that brings up a question – what are we supposed to do between at the airport between our arrival and departure?

Lots of things. Eat good food. Enjoy family. Rest. Work. Win Albany football games. And make the airport a better place every day. And above all, try to get as many people to board our plane as we possibly can. The truth is everyone is invited, but not everyone has their boarding pass yet. That comes through Jesus.

And some time between our arrival and departure, we all need to get baptized in the name of the father, son and Holy Spirit. And not just the ceremonial part of baptism, we all need to experience what it represents which is new birth.

If you haven't been baptized yet, let's start planning your day today.

Listen to the last words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel...

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Friends that means the Lord intends for baptism to be a huge part of the airport we live in.



Today is Robyn Trail's special day. You heard her tender story of how she has embraced the Lord Jesus as the Lord of her life. It will be a privilege to baptize her today. I have done some funerals since I've moved to Albany but no baptisms. This will be my first. Today is a happy day.

The title of our sermon today is, "the beauty of baptism."

Today we are going to take a look at baptism. What it is. Why we do it. And the things that are beautiful about babies getting baptized and the things that are beautiful about believers getting baptized (meaning anyone who is older than a baby and has made a volitional choice to get baptized like Robyn has).

How many of you were baptized as babies?

How many of you were baptized as a believer? (knew what you were doing)

I think infant baptism is beautiful and I think believers baptisms are beautiful and I want to now show you the difference between them and show you why I love both.

Open your Bibles to Colossians 2. Colossians 2:11-15

11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, **12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. **13** When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, **14** having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

Let's talk for a moment about why Presbyterian's baptize babies

Those of you who were baptized as infants were baptized in large part because of the words we just read.

Will an infant baptism save the child eternally? No

Will an infant baptism guarantee that a child will grow up to be an adult Christian?

No

Then why baptize a baby? Let me show you why...

God has historically always worked in covenants. Abraham is the father of the nation of Israel, where our faith comes from, and the scriptures say he believed God and was credited righteousness. Circumcision was the sign of that covenant. And that sign was done on the child before the child could believe. That ceremony was done on the 8th day of the child's life. It meant that God would call the child his own – once faith was expressed. Circumcision didn't guarantee salvation anymore than a baby's baptism does now but it was a way of marking the child as one who belonged to him. When does God begin to love us? Before we are even bore. He acts first. That is part of why we baptize babies. It's a tribute to the God who loves our little ones while they are still sinners.

We all know that circumcision, then and now, involves the shedding of blood. In the Old Testament, that foreshadowed what would have to happen to Jesus one day. It was also done to the reproductive part of a man to proclaim that through the seed of Jews, the messiah would be born.

Two thousand years before Jesus was born, this ceremony was done to little ones, on just the 8th day of their lives, to set them apart and mark them as ones who parents would raise to place their trust and faith in God.

Then what we see in the New Testament are stories of the first baptisms. And did you know that every single time in the book of Acts that a believer is baptized, their entire household is baptized as well. Children in all. Every single time except for the Ethiopian eunuch who could have no family of his own.

The most detailed and informative account is that of the Philippians jailer (Acts 16:30–34). “Believe in the Lord Jesus,” he was told, “and you shall be saved, you and your household” (vs. 31; cf. 11:14). Accordingly, the gospel was preached “to him together with all who were in his house” (vs. 32). In response, he “believed in God with his whole household” (vs. 34), whereupon “he was baptized, he and all his household” (vs. 33).

And then here in Colossians we see Paul linking baptism to circumcision...

11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, **12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Why is circumcision not mandated in the New Testament? In part because the seed of Abraham has come. Jesus fulfilled what circumcision pointed to. And the shedding of his blood ended our need to continue that tradition, though it continues to this day.

Here’s what hasn’t changed.

The need to be circumcised in our hearts. We all need to be pricked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We need to be marked there. And changed in our inner beings. We all need to die and be born again. And now, Presbyterian’s believe, that parents have been called to set their children apart, before they can believe, and we believe that can be done not through circumcision but baptism. That baptism is now the way that children should be set apart to live as covenant children of the most high God. I would say it’s biblically right to baptize a baby. It’s beautiful in all that it signifies.

Why I think this is beautiful...

Testimony Envy

I used to be critical of infant baptism. Now I think it’s beautiful. It didn’t make sense to me that an unbelieving baby would experience something that Jesus experienced as 33 years old man. That used to do it for me.

But I was a youth pastor for 12 years and many of my beloved students were baptized as infants. And many of them weren’t.

Every year we would go on mission trips and we would pray that God would make kids come to life by the Holy Spirit’s power. We would pray that they would spiritually die and be born again. We would pray that they would come home different. And many would. Then we would have a youth Sunday every May and many kids would give their testimonies. And many of them were powerful. They

would talk about how they had given up drugs, alcohol and wild living to embrace Jesus as the Lord of their lives.

And the church loved these stories. But **sometimes I saw testimony envy**. Some of the kids who knew Jesus and were baptized as infants and never felt the need to sin their fill would look discouraged. And they would turn in their testimonies to me to have me read them because that's how we selected the testimonies for the church services and they didn't think they had a story to tell. Mainly because they couldn't remember ever not knowing Jesus. Their testimony was a blurry progression. They just felt like they had always known him. They didn't ever feel the need to put mud in their mouth because they had always known that Jesus was better.

And I would hug these kids and say, "yours is the story I pray for my kids." You know what those other testimonies mean? It means that those kids, like me, didn't trust their parents that Jesus was better and they wanted to eat mud instead. It might mean their parents didn't raise them in the church.

Here's a powerful testimony – a child is set apart by their parents to be raised in Christ-centered community. That child never can remember a day when Jesus wasn't the most important thing in their life. The child was baptized as an infant and gradually grew into their faith and was born again over time. If that's your story God bless you. That's a good one. You thank God for your parents every day. They loved you enough to raise you in a Christian environment from day 1 and you may have drifted a little but if it's not much you owe a debt of gratitude to God for sparing you spiritual mud-pies and to your parents for raising you to walk with him all the days of your life.

That's Jim Leech's story. Billy Green's too. They were born here. Baptized here. They went through confirmation here. Now Jim's son and grand kids are here. That's why we baptize babies. It's biblical and it's beautiful.

When I was a youth pastor I was urgent in seeking God to move powerfully in our midst to make dead hearts live. I wanted to see kids come alive in Christ. But I was thankful that many of them had already been baptized. It took pressure of them and off me. Many of my youth pastor friends had the elders and other pastors of the church judging their success based on how many kids got baptized each year. And I think that pressure can sometimes hurt kids. It freed me to be urgent but it also freed me to just love kids right where they were. And I'm thankful I never had to work for someone who thought I was a failure if a certain amount of kids weren't baptized each summer. Because many of them had already been baptized.

And I say that with tons of love and respect in my heart for other traditions. I am just thankful for what infant baptism does for youth ministry. It allows for it to flow without pressure and kids can benefit from that.

Assurance of Salvation

The second reason I love infant baptism is because the people that experience it don't seem to struggle as much with the assurance of salvation.

Someone I love dearly has wrestled all their Christian life with the assurance of salvation. They grew up in a wonderful church but that church only baptized adults and this person has always wondered if they have done everything the right way in regards to how you decide to give your life to Christ. This person's agony seems linked to placing the choice entirely in the believer's hands.

When a baby is baptized, I simply think it's emotionally easier for the child to feel like their life and salvation has always been in the hands of a loving God.

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

The passage says it is God who makes us alive with Christ. Infant baptism is a powerful way for a parent to tell God – "I'm counting on you, to make my child alive with Christ." It's a way to tell him, "I'm going to do everything in my power to raise this child to know you but ultimately the born again, circumcision of the heart experience is yours to give." It's a way of pleading with God to set your child apart to never know a day away from him.

And I don't have a study to prove this – but my gut tells me that people baptized as infants that eventually grow into their faith – might just have an easier time believing that once God circumcises your heart it's permanent. He cannot undo his most profound work in making someone new.

It's biblical and it's right and it can be comforting to baptize infants.

But it's also biblical and right and comforting to baptize a believer. Like what Robyn is going to experience today.

A believer's baptism is also a thing of beauty...

And let me say this before I tell you why...

Every Presbyterian church should not only baptize babies. That would be a sign of a stale church. If no adults get baptized at MMPC during my time here – it may mean God didn't move much. It may mean we are an exclusive club. Because not everyone in Albany, was born and baptized. One of the ways you know God is moving in your midst is if he moves people that didn't grow up in church to come to know him through a church. And in that case an adult baptism will be done as a sign of an inward transformation.

Why is a believer's baptism a thing of beauty...

Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, **12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Today we are going to Hubbard Creek Lake. And we are going to put Robyn's whole body under water. We are going to bury her in water for a moment.

And then we are going to raise her up out of the water.

And this symbolizes what has happened on the inside of her and what God intends for all of us to experience.

God yearns for all of us to die. Spiritually. And he yearns for all of us to be washed by the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus. And he yearns for us to be raised up out of the water in the newness of life.

When I was in Israel we saw a 2000-year-old baptismal area. It had entry steps. And people would enter with dirty clothes on. After their baptism they would put on new clothes that were pure and clean. And they would come out of the water, after their baptism, with new clothes on the other side of the water.



There was once a man who cheated everyone in town and got rich doing it. He was a banker and a dishonest one. He eventually collided with the Lord Jesus. He was made new by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And he came forward for his baptism. And the preacher said, "you may want to take off that Armani suit before you enter the waters. And the man said, "no thanks I think I'll keep it on." But sir he said, "that's a nice suit. I know it's very expensive." And the man said, "yes it was expensive but I still think I'll keep it on." And the preacher said, "sir, I don't think you understand how this works. I'm going to immerse your entire body in these waters and when that happens your suit will be ruined."

And the man finally said, "I know pastor. I want this suit to be ruined. I want everyone here to know that I was a wretched man and that wretched man earned this suit in a dishonest manner. But Jesus has changed my life. And he has wrecked my old self. I want everyone to know that the man I used to be is dead and that I have been born again. I want everyone to know that I have been resurrected unto life through the life changing power of the Holy Spirit. I want everyone to know that I

am a new creation and that old things are gone and new things have come. Go ahead. Ruin it.”

I think it’s biblical and it’s right and it’s beautiful to baptize believers wouldn’t you say? You know what grieves God? When Presbyterians think our way of baptism is better than the way our brothers and sisters at other churches do it.

And it grieves him when people that baptize believers judge our way as being less than biblical. I just read a book about a man named Charles Finny and he was a famous preacher in the 1800s and he said an entire revival in a town was once completed halted when the Baptists and the Presbyterians began to fight about baptism. He said literally the movement ceased when arguing broke out in the town. And then, when Finney preached on the beauty of both modes, the town repented of their arguing and the movement of God’s spirit picked up again. We need to love our friends and bothers and sisters from other churches and respect how they read the bible here. Baptizing babies is biblical and beautiful and so is baptizing a believer.



Which airline marketing slogan do you think is best?

United – Come fly the friendly skies

Delta – We love to fly. And it shows.

Southwest – You are now free to move about the country.

American Airlines – We’re American Airlines, something special in the air.



Even though United is far from my favorite airline, I like, “come fly the friendly skies” the best.

The world would make you think that any airline will do. And every airline is competing for your business. But I want to close with this...

When it comes to the spiritual airport that we all live in, only one flight home will do. Before you die or before Jesus comes again you need to get baptized in the name of the father, the son and Holy Spirit. With water but more importantly in your heart. There is but one way to fly the friendly skies and that is with Jesus as your pilot. He alone can pilot you where you want to go for eternity.

In the future, Jesus is coming to get us. And he doesn’t need a plane. He’s coming in the clouds. To take you and I from the airport. And if you love him, if you have been baptized both with water and your heart has been circumcised, you will fly the friendly skies with him into eternity. Make sure you have your boarding pass. It’s free. Paid in full. All you have to do is tell him you want one. Friends life is like an airport, may we make the most of the time we have. Amen.

Benediction:

All of you are invited to join us at the Trail's lake house today at 3 p.m.

We will dine. We will celebrate. We may watch it rain. But primarily we are gathering to baptize Robyn Trail in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We will bury her in water and watch her resurrected unto life. We will watch her experience a symbol of what is meant to happen in all our lives during our stay at the airport.

Leave this place thanking God for your baptism, either the one you experienced as a baby or the one you experienced as a believer. It represents the faithfulness of God and the inner circumcision he desires each of us to experience. Leave this place and if you haven't been baptized, let's start planning yours today. Remember, your layover at the airport could end at any time so don't wait. Leave this place and rest in the assurance of your salvation. If you have been baptized with water and have believed in the Lord Jesus, you are a family member of the Lord Jesus himself and he never disowns one of his own. Leave this place and every once in a while gaze up at the friendly skies and say, "perhaps today. Perhaps today the pilot of heaven, the Lord Jesus himself, will come and get me and take me home." Amen.