

Hope Church South Haven June 1st, 2025

Say what?!?! What's the deal with baptism?

Mark 2:13-17

Second last week of the series **SAY WHAT?!?!** Honest conversations about common misbeliefs of Christians. Today we are talking about:

What's the deal with baptism?

Need to start today with a **DISCLAIMER!!!** If you have any questions after today, if anything is unclear, please come and talk to me or the elders after the service. Send me an email. Let's go for coffee.

What's comes to mind when you see one of these signs? What do they represent and what do they mean?

- Batman – if you're in trouble and need help...good news. If you're a criminal...not so good news.
- **Chick-fil-a** – a certain celebrity in town taught me: Jesus chicken.
- USA flag – pride. Freedom. Bravery. Opportunities.
- **Springbok** – show the video.

Whenever I see the Springbok logo, it brings up a lot of memories and feelings. It feels like yesterday ...

- It was 1995. South Africa just came out of apartheid. It was the Rugby world cup final.
- Skinny 16-year-old watching the game in the garage of a friend.
- Celebrations after the final whistle. South Africa was one big party. Black and white and Asian. Afrikaans and English and Zulu and Xhosa.

Visible signs or symbols carry **meaning**. It **trigger emotions** in us. It can help us remember special MOMENTS and CONNECTIONS and PEOPLE.

You can open your Bible at **MARK 2**.

Mark 2:13-15

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth.

"Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

- Tax collectors were tasked by the Romans authorities to raise money.
- They lived off the money they charged extra. No guideline of how much they could charge.

- The Jews had no time for tax collectors – in the Talmud, tax collectors were grouped together with murderers and thieves.

Mark 2:15-16

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples:

“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

- Eating was a serious business 2000 years ago.
- When you ate with someone, it implied that you shared the same ideas and values. You were telling the world: 'I accept this person.'
- Jesus is eating with sinners. He is saying to the world – I accept these people. I don't condemn them. I'm not closing the doors to God's world to them.

Mark 2:17

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Mark 2:13-17 NIV

- Jesus is not excluding spiritually healthy people. You can see this in Jesus' parables:

⇒ The shepherd did not send the 99 sheep away to look for the one that was lost. The 99 sheep were still his sheep.

⇒ The father in the story of the prodigal son did not leave the older brother out of the party. He invited him in.

- In Mark 2, Jesus emphasizes how inclusive God's family is.
- Jesus calls out to everyone: FOLLOW ME!

⇒ It doesn't matter if it's been years since you've been in church — **FOLLOW ME!**

⇒ It doesn't matter if you struggle with anxiety or fear or alone – **FOLLOW ME!**

⇒ It doesn't matter if you've made the worst mistake or caused unrepairable pain –

FOLLOW ME!

⇒ It doesn't matter if life is easy and you are happy – **FOLLOW ME!**

Why did I start with Mark 2 when we're talking about baptism today?

#1 Jesus called us to follow him...

not a pastor or a church or a denomination.

- God doesn't care if you're REFORMED or CATHOLIC or METHODIST or NON-DENOMINATIONAL or PENTECOSTALS. He is **big enough**. He is creative enough. To have room for us all.
- The religious traditions we follow are **less important** than Jesus and the Bible.
- The church group or denomination we belong to is **less important** than Jesus and the Bible.
- In Mark 2 we are reminded that we are called to follow the real Jesus. **Not a domesticated-comfortable-version of Jesus.**

[Jesus] is presented [in the Gospels] as homeless, propertyless, nomadic, socially marginal, disdainful of kinfolk, without a trade or occupation, a friend of outcasts and pariahs, averse to material possessions, without fear for his own safety, a thorn in the side of the Establishment and a scourge of the rich and powerful.

Terry Eagleton

- It's uncomfortable. It **challenges** my thoughts and ideas and preferences. It's ALWAYS CHANGING AND IMPROVING ME.
- It's **discovering** that living the way Jesus did is the best way to live. There is more to this life than me. There is more to life than just getting more and better and shinier things.
- It's about **learning** to **live like Jesus**.

#2 Baptism doesn't save. Communion doesn't save.

- Jesus saves. Not my LIFESTYLE. Not my CHURCH. Not the SACRAMENTS.
- Jesus' **incarnation**. His **life**. His **death**. His **resurrection**. Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. That saves.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16 NIV

- Since the Enlightenment in the 18th century, people started **to interpret "believe"** as what you know or understand about Jesus.
- John uses the Greek word PISTEO (πιστεύω) – **PISTEO** means the act of trusting something based on its **truthfulness and reliability**.
 - ⇒ Trapeze artist letting go and trusting that his partner will catch him.
 - ⇒ Jumping out of a plane trusting your parachute will open.
- Believe means **giving myself completely** to Jesus. No lifelines or safeguards. No get-out-of-jail-free cards. I'm all in.

- Convinced that the Bible's version of Jesus is true. Trusting that Jesus can save.
- SALVATION is by grace alone, **through faith alone**, in Christ alone.
- Remember the Batman sign. USA flag. Springbok emblem.
- Baptism and Communion have a purpose. We don't do them only because they are traditions.
- Baptism and Communion are **signs and symbols helping us UNDERSTAND**, remember, and experience God's promises. In a way that we can **see and touch and taste and feel**.
- It reminds us that **God is real**, his promises are true, and that we are included in his family.
- It enriches and strengthens our faith.

#3 We have made the gift of baptism more complicated than it needs to be.

- Christians, pastors, and churches don't just disagree about baptism—they argue about it. These disagreements cause churches to split apart.
- For the first Christians, baptism was not a source of conflict or debate. It was **accepted** and NOT SEEN as a major issue.
 - ⇒ They baptized young and old.
 - ⇒ They baptized individuals and families.
 - ⇒ They poured water on the heads and completely immersed people.
- The oldest Sunday school book in church history is called the **DIDACHE**. It was written in the first century, probably around the **same time as the Gospels**, between 50 and 100 A.D.
- The ONLY NON-NEGOTIABLES about baptism was that it must be done with water and be **done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**. Everything else didn't really matter.
- The first choice was to use living water – running water.

But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

– Didache.

- Super uncomplicated. Just make baptisms great again!
- Just make it happen.
- The first church understood **Paul's words** in the letter to the Ephesians. That the baptism was a gift and not a reason for division.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all**, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:2-6 NIV

#4 The bible allows for both: baptizing babies and people when the decide to follow Jesus.

- CONVERSION BAPTISM: people getting baptized when **they decide to follow Jesus**.

When they decide to **accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior**.

- Jesus called his disciples to do just that.

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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20 NIV

- CONVERSION BAPTISM points to the **salvation work of Jesus**. Helping us to understand and remember and experience what **happened at Calvary**.
⇒ Laying down your **old life**. Laying down your **old habits**. Laying down your **old beliefs**.
⇒ It was a **visible tangible necessary** moment that showed to everyone:

I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.

- BABY BAPTISM: when the church **baptizes the babies of believers**.
- Baby baptism is based on the idea that God always reaches out to people **first**. Always makes the first move – take the **first steps** – TO CONNECT WITH US.
⇒ In **GENESIS 12**, God made a promise to Abraham, saying, **“I will be your God.”**
Later, in **GENESIS 17**, God gave circumcision as a sign of this promise.

Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

Genesis 17:9-11 NIV

- ⇒ In **GENESIS 26**, God promised **ISAAC**, “**I will be your God,**” because of the promise He made to Isaac’s father, Abraham.
- ⇒ God made the same promise to **Jacob** in **GENESIS 28**, even after Jacob tricked his brother and lied to his father, Isaac.
- In the REFORMED TRADITION we believe that baptizing babies has taken the place of circumcision.
 - ⇒ I really struggled with this idea of baptizing babies during my **six years studying theology and my first five years in full time ministry.** I found it hard to understand and think it through.
 - ⇒ I didn’t truly understand what infant baptism meant UNTIL I BAPTIZED LYNE.
 - ⇒ In that moment, as I poured water over her, I was **overwhelmed by God's love and grace.**

⇒ God made a promise to Lyne that **HE WILL PURSUE HER** despite having me as her dad. That **HE WILL LOVE HER**. That **HE WILL COVER HER** with His grace. That **HE WILL REVEAL HIMSELF** to her. That He will never stop.

⇒ As the conversion baptism points to Calvary, **baptizing babies point to the God of the covenant.** It reminds us of a God that takes the first step. Of a God who reaches out. Of a God that searches for the lost and broken and the poor.

⇒ In my honest opinion: baptizing of babies is the **most beautiful expression of God's love and grace.**

In the REFORMED TRADITION, we believe you don't need to be baptized again because **God always keeps His promises and never changes.**

However, our church leaders want baptism to be a MORE VISIBLE PART OF OUR FAITH JOURNEY. So, 16 months ago, we decided we want to **give people a chance to celebrate their baptism**—kind of like renewing your wedding vows.

It's about CELEBRATING what's **already true**. Like Steve always said – celebrating an existing reality. It's not about getting baptized again.

This celebration can include being sprinkled with water, having water poured over you, or being fully immersed.

If you have decided to follow Jesus and have never been baptized, **come and get baptized.**

If you were baptized as a baby and want to remember how God has worked in your life, **come and celebrate your baptism.**

Next opportunity: LAKE ARVESTA – AGUST 31ST 2025!

BLESSING

May this day bring Sabbath rest to your heart and your home.

May God's image in you be restored, and your imagination in God be re-storied.

May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down.

May you know grace to embrace your own smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

May God's Word feed you and His Spirit lead you into the week and into the life to come.