

## The meaning of our baptism, today

### *A Readers Theatre of Scripture based on Matthew 28:19-20 and John 21:15-19*

*Setting: On the mountain where Jesus gives his "great commission." Jesus speaks the words from Matthew 28:19-20 in front of the crowd of disciples. Then, Peter approaches Jesus on his own. Peter discusses with Jesus about his uncertainties about the meaning of his own baptism.*

**Jesus:** ...Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.

*Crowd of disciples disperse, chatting, while a lone disciple approaches Jesus for clarification.*

**Peter:** Umm, Jesus? Can I ask you a couple of follow-up questions regarding what you just said?

**Jesus:** Of course, Peter, come over here and sit. What is it you want to know?

**Peter:** I understand you want us to go teach others everything that you've commanded us, but I'm going to be honest, I'm struggling with the "baptize" part.

**Jesus:** Why is that?

**Peter:** Well, how am I supposed to baptize others, when I'm not so sure I understand the meaning of my own baptism.

**Jesus:** What do you mean? Don't you remember why you were baptized?

**Peter:** Kind of. [*Thoughtfully*] I remember the day I went to see John in the Jordan. I remember he was preaching about the coming Kingdom of God and calling us to repentance and new birth, to prepare ourselves for the kingdom by entering the waters of purification. I remember some of my other brothers were going in the water and I felt the urge to follow too. But Jesus, I can't say I fully remember my reasons and I don't know if I've thought about it much since that day.

**Jesus:** Well, you're thinking of it now, aren't you?

**Peter:** Yeah, but I don't know how I'm supposed to think about it. Did it matter? Did I do it for the right reasons? Did it change me? When John plunged me under the water, I can't say I felt any different.

**Jesus:** What were you expecting?

**Peter:** I don't know, maybe a feeling that I'd changed? That something was different? Coming from the man who had the clouds part for him and a voice speak from heaven, I would think you might understand.

**Jesus:** I do understand, Peter. You wanted to know that your baptism meant something and that it changed you. And it did.

**Peter:** Really? Because after the events of this last week, I don't know if there's much evidence of that "change." Do you remember how I denied you, and three times, no less?

**Jesus:** I do remember that.

**Peter:** And now you want me to go tell others to be baptized? How am I supposed to call others to *repentance* and *new birth* through baptism when my own baptism didn't prevent me from denying you? Some big "change."

*There's a short pause before Jesus addresses Peter*

**Jesus:** Peter?

**Peter:** Yes, Lord?

**Jesus:** Do you love me?

**Peter:** Yes, Lord, you know I love you.

**Jesus:** Feed my lambs. [PAUSE] Do you love me?

**Peter:** Yes, Lord, you know I love you.

**Jesus:** Take care of my sheep. [PAUSE] Do you love me?

**Peter:** Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.

**Jesus:** Feed my sheep! [Pause] There. We've undone your denial and helped you live into your baptism at the same time!

**Peter:** Excuse me? How have we done either?

**Jesus:** Peter, your baptism wasn't just an event "back then" and it wasn't meaningful because you experienced some *grand* change in that one moment and lived a spotless life afterwards. Your baptism back then testified to God already at work in you and your baptism continues to be meaningful today because it opened a path for you to live for God and it was on that path that I called you deeper into my mission. [Pause] Do you remember that day you left your nets and followed me when I called you?

**Peter:** Yes.

**Jesus:** Your baptism prepared you for that, you know?

**Peter:** It did?

**Jesus:** It did. And yes, you later denied me, but your baptism can help you make sense of that too?

**Peter:** How can that be? Isn't baptism about confessing our faith in God? How can my denial of you, God's son, help me make sense of my baptism?

**Jesus:** Peter, baptism is about dying to that part of us that would seek to live for ourselves alone. And its about rising again to live a life for God and for others. By telling me you love me today and by being willing to feed my sheep, you are dying to the fear and selfishness that led you to deny me and you are living into your new life - you are claiming your baptism today. The good news of my resurrection is that our relationship can't be defined forever by your denial because you can still choose to live for me today! [Pause] So, don't get too caught up about what happened *the day* you were baptized, instead, *claim your baptism today*, and *tomorrow*, and in *the future*.

**Peter:** I think I'm beginning to understand, Lord.

**Jesus:** Good, then go, tell people that "the water is ready" and God is calling.

**Peter:** I will, Lord.