

"Seeing God's Grace in Baptism"

Mary Henderson Bowman

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When we think of baptisms in the Presbyterian Church, we tend to think of babies.

That may be, of course, because most baptisms in our church are of babies.

But it may also be because baptisms have become synonymous with baby watching — we watch and wait to see how each baby reacts to all that is going on.

I have to confess that during baptisms I often worry that parishioners are so focused on the baby and the human tableau before them — that they forget to watch for and recognize the incredible thing that God is doing in the baptism.

Baptisms are designed to be a time when the focus is on God.

Everything about a baptism should direct us to God and the grace that is being given.

If you happen to be a baby watcher (and on some level, aren't we all) then may I encourage you to use that watching as a launchpad to claiming the grace gift that God is giving in baptism.

When a baby is sound asleep during the whole baptism, can we be reminded that God does all the heavy-lifting in baptism? Baptism is such a profound expression of God's one-sided grace that we can even sleep through it while others serve as witnesses.

Baptism reminds us that God is always doing the heavy-lifting to keep us in communion with God — this is, after all, why Christ came.

When a baby is fussy or having a tantrum, can we marvel at a God who loves us in our worst moments, regardless of how we are feeling or how we are acting? God loves us and accepts us in all of our worst moments.

God does not condone all of our behaviors but our behaviors cannot diminish God's love for us.

When a baby seems curious about everything going on in the baptism, can we be reminded that this is a beautiful posture for us to have before God — always curious and watching for what God might be doing next?

Infant baptisms remind us that baptism is a gift that we cannot give ourselves.

We cannot save ourselves and yet we have a God who has come to do just that.

So, I have another confession . . .

I need to confess that adult baptisms are some of my favorite baptisms.

There is something SO special about an adult baptism.

Adult baptisms remind us that our "yes" to God's love and grace matters.

Adult baptisms highlight that we are participants in our life with God.

As we know from infant baptisms, our "yes" is not required for God to extend grace to us . . .

but as we grow in faith and in the ability to commune with God, it is important to say "yes" to the invitations that God gives us.

Our relationship with God is a partnership. And there is no silent partner. Our "yes" in baptism is a reminder of the daily "yes" that we make to God and that God is making to us.

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Adult baptisms remind us that God is always at work in our lives to love us and to woo us and to invite us into deeper communion with God. God has graciously had God's eye on Megan¹ throughout her life and slowly she has understood that. Adult baptisms remind us of God's faithfulness throughout our lives.

There is also something so special about being baptized and being able to remember it. An adult baptism is a touchpoint of faith. Megan can look back and remember this moment of receiving God's grace, saying "yes" to God's grace, and of being held within the love of a community who gathered to hear her "yes" and to commit themselves to her.

Baptism echoes what we heard from Isaiah: "I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."

Baptism also echoes what we heard from our New Testament reading: "This is my child, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased."

Baptism is a visible sign of God's grace, of God's promises, of God's faithfulness, of God's love. In baptism, God calls us by name and gives us our deepest identity — being the beloved child of God.

Megan, we are so pleased to welcome you to God's family!

¹ Megan's (adult) baptism was a part of the service, along with a service of the Reaffirmation of Baptism.