

September 20, 2009
 First Baptist Vancouver

Text: John 1: 19-34

Title: **“The One Who Baptizes In and With the Holy Spirit”**

(Series: “Who Is Jesus?”)

Who is He? Jesus of Nazareth. About whom more books have been written than any other person in history. For whom more songs have been written and sung than any other person in history. First born son of a humble maiden. Adopted son of a rugged carpenter. Who is He?

“We are a community following Jesus,” we say of First Baptist church: “We are a community following Jesus with a heart for the city and beyond.” OK. So, Who is He? Who is this Jesus we are seeking to follow at this time and in this place? The fact is we will never be done with the question! We will never be done asking it let alone answering it. Given Who He is, given Who the New Testament says He is....no one will ever be able to say, “Well, that’s it ... I have mastered Jesus ... time to move on to something more important.”

As my friend Dale Bruner puts it: “There are no graduates from the Jesus School.” There are only and always under-graduates. Who is Jesus? No question comes with higher stakes. For given Who He is ...given Who the New Testamnet says He iseverything ...everything ...literally everything rides on how we answer.

Last Sunday we turned to John the Baptist for help. We do so again today. Why John? Because all four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John –begin their telling of the story of Jesus with John the Baptist. Why? John is the last in a line of the great Prophets: Beginning with Elijah, then Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Jonah, Amos ... on to Malachi ...and finally to John. But whereas the other Prophets looked to the day when He would come, John actually gets to announce His arrival! To John was given the great privilege of being the first person to actually introduce Jesus to the world. So we ask the great Baptist, “Who is Jesus?” And oh what an answer he gives! “The LORD.” “I am a voice crying in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the LORD’.” John is quoting from the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 40, verse 3, “A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness’.” In that context ‘the LORD’ is the God of Israel. In that context ‘the LORD’ is the Creator of the universe. In that context ‘the LORD’ is Yahweh, the true and living God. “Make straight the way of the LORD,” says the Baptizer. Jesus – LORD? Jesus – the God of Israel? Jesus – the Creator of the universe? Jesus – Yahweh come to earth? Yahweh in human flesh? The name ‘Jesus’ is the English for the Greek Iesous; Iesous in the Greek for the Hebrew ‘Joshua’, or Y-shua. Y’shua means ‘Yahweh saves’, or ‘Yahweh to the rescue’. Jesus of Nazareth – John the Baptist’s cousin – Yahweh to the rescue? “Make straight the way for Yahweh to the rescue!” No wonder John preached with such passion such a sense of urgency! And no

wonder John says of Jesus “He existed before me” – vs. 30. Although Jesus was born six months after John, He existed long before John was conceived in his mother’s womb. And no wonder John says “I am not worthy untie the strings on His sandals” – vs. 27. Who is? And no wonder John says of Jesus “this is the Son of God” – vs. 34 At the least! At minimum the Creator in our flesh is Son of God. The only-begotten Son of God the Father, God the Son, Who for all eternity exists in the heart of the Father, Who in word and deed reveals the Father. That is Who the great Baptist thinks Jesus is! “Make straight the way of God-to-the-rescue.” And John tells us why the LORD comes. John tells us why He comes the way He comes. The Baptist tells us that Jesus comes to do a two-fold work. And this two-fold work is expressed in two provocative titles.

They are, one, “**The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world**” - the title we considered last Sunday - and two, “**The One Who Baptizes in and with the Holy Spirit.**” “The one who sent me to baptize in and with water said to me,” says John, vs. 33, “said, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit’.”

The Son of God, God the Son in our flesh, is the Lamb of God, Who comes to take away the sin of the world, and the One Who baptizes in and with the Holy Spirit.

The two works belong **together**. And it is when the two titles are kept **together** that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is really good, good news! Yahweh-to-the-rescue takes away the sin of the world ... mercy! And then baptizes human beings in and with the Spirit of God!

John Stott of England put it best, in a sermon he preached for the Urban conference in the early 1970s. “We must never conceive of ‘salvation’ in purely negative terms, as if it consisted only in rescue from sin, guilt, wrath and death. We thank God that it is all these things. But it also includes the positive blessing of the Holy Spirit to regenerate, indwell, liberate and transform. What a truncated gospel we preach if we proclaim the one without the other! And what a glories gospel we have to share (with the city) when we are true to Scripture!” (*Baptism and Fullness*, 25) .

Jesus of Nazareth, the eternally existing Son of the Father, God the Son, comes to take away sin, and to baptize us in and with the Spirit of God! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin baptizes! Sweet! Like His cousin John, Jesus also baptizes. Jesus is a Baptist! John baptizes Jesus in and with water. And then Jesus baptizes John ... any one else who welcomes Jesus .. in and with the Holy Spirit! The best baptism!

I want to ask two questions about this second of Jesus’ two-fold work. Question one: **what** does it mean? What does “**The One Who baptizes in and with the Holy Spirit**” mean? Are there other ways to express what it means? Question two: **when** does Jesus do it?

When does He baptize us? **What?** And **When?** What does it mean? And, **when** does He do it? **What does it mean?** For one thing it means history is reaching a climax point. It means that a great promise is being fulfilled. The great promise to pour out the Spirit of God upon all flesh. Joel, chapter 2, verse 28.

“And it will come about after this
 that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh,
 and your sons and daughters will prophesy,
 and your old men will dream dreams,
 and your young men will see visions.”

In Jesus the great expectation of God Himself pouring Himself on humankind is beginning to be realized! But why the term “baptize”? “This is the One Who **baptizes** in and with the Holy Spirit”? What is John the Baptizer getting at? In both pre-Biblical and Biblical Greek, ‘baptizo’ simply means ‘to immerse.’ Immerse. It was used to describe “sinking in the mud.” It was used to describe “plunging beneath the surface.” In its passive form – “be baptized” –it meant “to be overwhelmed,” “to be inundated.” Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world baptizes **in and with** the Holy Spirit. You may have noticed that I have been saying both prepositions. The English text uses only one – “in.” Why, then, have I been using two – “in” and “with”? Because the preposition John uses (en) means both “in” and “with.” And as is often the case in the NT when a word has multiple meanings all the meanings are intended.

In and with. Jesus baptizes **in and with**. “In” calls attention to that into which we are immersed. “With” calls attention to that which overwhelms us when we are immersed.

HERE IS THE GOSPEL! The Good News! Just as John the Baptist immersed repentant sinners **in** the waters of the Jordan River, so Jesus the Baptist immerses repentant sinners **in** the Spirit of God. Mercy! And just as those who went into the Jordan River were thus overwhelmed **with** water, so those whom Jesus baptizes in the Spirit are overwhelmed **with** the Spirit. Mercy! Mercy! Or, to put it more graphically, Jesus the Baptist dunks us in and drenches us with the very Life of the Living God! Mercy! Mercy! Mercy! Now, being baptized by the Lamb of God, ought to manifest itself in our lives in some way, ought it not? I like how Thomas Smail puts it:

“It may be sudden, critical and sensationally transforming;
 it may be slow and quiet and spread over a period (of time);
 the Spirit is symbolized (in Scripture) as dew as well as by wind,
 but even when the dew falls silently, it will make the leaves
 wet and fresh and sweet.”

[Reflected Glory, 153].

I like that! Wet, fresh, sweet. Being baptized by Jesus the Baptist will manifest itself in different people in different ways. In different personality types in different ways. In different cultural settings in different ways. The one common denominator for all is the experience of **newness**. There is a new quality of life ...a freshness ... a Divine nearness and intimacy ...a different kind of vitality. Please Jesus, baptize. Is there another way to express this good news of the Gospel?

Yes. Theologians use the word “effusion.” E f f u s i o n. Effusion. The escape of liquid from its container. Free flow. Effusion. Isn’t that a cool word? Theologians use the word in conjunction with two other words:

Creation and Incarnation. All three are the work of the Triune God. The work of Creation mostly associated with God the Father. The work of Incarnation mostly associated with God the Son. The work of Effusion mostly associated with God the Spirit. Professor of Systematic Theology, J. Rodman Williams, makes the point this way:

“We are dealing in effusion with that activity of the Holy Spirit – not possible adequately to describe – wherein He moves in freedom, pervading and filling human reality. [Repeat] This is the coming of God to occupy and possess, to pervade and permeate, to fill and fulfill. It goes beyond creation and incarnation, not as a kind of third on the same plane, but passing through them, transcending both. Herein God, while remaining transcendent, nonetheless possesses the heights and depths of creaturely existence. It is the filling of human existence with the glory of God.”[New Theology for a New Era – essay].WOW!

Dallas Willard, whom many of you have read, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, In his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, uses the word “engulfment.” Jesus promises an engulfment in the Spirit of God. He promises to cloth us, dress us, in “power from on high.” Again, WOW!

Jesus of Nazareth, the Creator incarnate in our flesh, the Lamb of God Who redeems us from the grip of SIN ...baptizes ... He baptizes us ... He immerses us in, soaks us in, engulfs us in, overwhelms us with, lavishes us with, drenches us with with the VERY LIFE and GLORY of the Living God! This wonderful dimension of the Gospel is expressed most clearly for me in the hymn, *Spirit of God Descend Upon My Heart*, written in 1854. Listen to this poetic rendering of the good news.

“Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;
Wean it from earth, through all its pulses move;
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as Thou art,
And make me love Thee as I ought to love.

.....

Teach me to love Thee as Thine angels love,
One holy passion filling all my frame;
The baptism of the heaven-descended Dove;
My heart an altar and Thy love the flame.”

(Sing?)

The composer of that hymn knows the effusion, the engulfment. The composer has been baptized. We come then to the second question I want to ask of John the Baptist’s witness to Jesus. **When?** When does the Lamb of God baptize a person in and with the Holy

Spirit? When does the effusion take place in our lives? As I see it, there are three possibilities, each advocated by serious students of the Scriptures. I will label them the sacramental option, the evangelical option, and the charismatic option.

1. Option one: the sacramental. It is argued that this effusion happens when we are baptized in and with water. This is the answer often given by those who hold a high view of the efficacy of the ordinances; the view that baptism and the Lord's Supper not only symbolize Gospel realities, they actually effect the realities. Being baptized in and with water, in the name of the Trinity, issues in being baptized in and with the Spirit. When a person is sprinkled with or lowered into H₂O, Jesus Christ immerses the person in and overwhelms the person with the Spirit of God.

2. Option two: the evangelical. It is argued that this effusion takes place at the time when a person says his or her "yes" to Jesus. It is argued that this effusion is what makes a person a Christian. It is argued that being baptized by Jesus in and with the Spirit initiates one into the Christian life. When we turn around and put our trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord He takes away our sin and effuses us with His Life.

3. Option three: the charismatic. It is argued that this effusion takes place sometime after conversion, sometime after becoming a Christian. It is therefore often referred to as the "second blessing." It is argued that one first comes to know the Risen Lord and begins the journey of discipleship. Then after walking with Him for while, Jesus baptizes the Christian. First we are regenerated and indwelt; and one day, anointed, flooded, empowered. It is argued that this is Jesus' own experience. Conceived by the Spirit, Filled with the Spirit from infancy. And then at His baptism, empowered for ministry by the Spirit. It is also argued that this "second blessing" pattern is the pattern worked out in the book of Acts, in the story of the emerging church.

First, folks are converted by the Spirit. Then later on baptized in and with the Spirit. SO, which of these three major options is correct?

Sacramental. Evangelical. Charismatic?

Oh dear, I see we have run out of time ... we will have to wait until next Sunday for the answer. Just kidding! As I have wrestled with this, I have come to the conclusion that ... Ready? each of the options is wrong, and each of the options is right. And each of the options is wrong and right for the same reason.

(Repeat).

You see, each option works from the same assumption; the assumption that Jesus baptizes us only once. We make that assumption because we are ordinarily baptized in and with water only once. BUT that is not how John the Baptizer sees it. Listen again to the way he puts it. Listen carefully.

Vs. 33 –

“The One Who sent me to baptize in and with water – the Father – said to me, ‘He upon Whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining, this is the One Who **baptizes** in and with the Holy Spirit’.” Baptizes. Present tense. This is crucial to note. In NT Greek the tenses of verbs do point to the time of action. But more importantly they point to the KIND of action. In NT Greek, the present tense emphasizes continuous action, and is best rendered “keep on ...” “Abide in Me and I in you.” “Keep on abiding in Me and I in you.” “All who come to Me and believe in Me will never hunger or thirst.” “All who keep on coming to Me and keep on believing in Me will never hunger or thirst.” John the Baptizer is saying of Jesus the Baptizer “this is the One Who **keeps on** baptizing.” Continuous action. **Keeps on baptizing.**

THAT IS, John is saying something about the nature and character of Jesus. John is saying that it is the nature of Jesus the Savior of the world to baptize and keep on baptizing, to immerse and keep on immersing, to soak and keep on soaking, to flood and keep on flooding, to fill and keep on filling, to infuse and keep on infusing. This is the One Who baptizes not once, not twice, not three times ...but again and again and again. Jesus keeps on effusing His followers with Divine Life and will keep on doing so until every fiber of our being radiates with the Glory of God. How’s that for good news? You can see then that option one – the sacramental – is right. When we are baptized in and with water, Jesus baptizes us in and with the Holy Spirit. But option one is wrong: this is not the last time He will do it. You can see then that option two – the evangelical – is right. When we surrender to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, He baptizes in and with the Spirit of God. But option two is wrong: this is not the last time He will do it.

And you can see then that option three – the charismatic – is right. There is a time subsequent to conversion when Jesus baptizes us in and with the Spirit of God. But option three is wrong: the “second blessing” is not the last time Jesus will do it. Jesus the Baptist does not baptize just once. He is the One Who keeps on baptizing, Who keeps on dunking His people in and drenching His people with His Spirit.! THIS, I think, is what we see happening in the book of Acts. It all begins with Jesus’ promise – Acts 1:5 – “you will be baptized in and with the Spirit not many days from now.” Then on the Day of Pentecost, the Risen Jesus pours out His Spirit upon the first band of disciples. The text says – Acts 2:4 – “and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit ...people thought they were ‘full of sweet wine’.” But then a few days later, the Living Lord did it again! The text says – Acts 4:31 – “the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit ...and with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.” The same band of disciples was dunked and drenched again; they were given another soaking. And as we read the rest of the story we see Jesus doing it again and again. WHY this “keep on baptizing”? I have already suggested the chief reason: it is the nature of Jesus to keep on giving His life to us. There is another. We keep on “quenched” and “grieving” the Spirit. “Do not quench the Spirit” the apostle Paul exhorts us (1 Thess. 5:19). “Do not grieve the

Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” he tells us (Eph.4:30). Again and again we do and say things that wound and offend the Holy One – harbor anger, nurture bitterness, gossip about and slander others. We are, therefore, again and again in need of a cleansing bath, we are in need of a showering of new grace.

There is yet another reason for the “keep on.” At the beginning of the journey with Jesus Christ none of us is ready to handle the fullness of the Fullness. We are after all taking about being invaded and permeated by God! By the third person of the Trinity! Who can handle being effused by and with God? So the effusion happens in stages: “grace upon grace” as the apostle John puts it (1:16). “Being transformed from glory to glory” as Paul puts it (2 Cor. 3:18). There is yet one more reason for the “keep on.” Not only are we not ready, many of us are not willing for the effusion to happen.

Not willing? Why? Fear. Am I right? We are afraid. We are afraid that if we were to really open up to Jesus’ baptism the effusion might make us look weird. I know that fear! And we are afraid that if we were to really open up to Jesus’ baptism we might get swept up into something beyond our control. Am I right?

Beyond our control.

Well ... the fact is IT IS beyond our control... for HE is beyond our control. We are, after all, talking about the Living God, the Creator of all things, coming to occupy and possess. Who can control Him? So, sadly, we settle for a manageable form of religion, and hold the full reality at arms length. Out of fear we try to domesticate the Wind and Fire of God, and settle for the predictable, even if it is no longer satisfying. BUT the fact is we need not fear the effusion. For the simply reason that we were made for this! From the beginning of God’s dealing with humanity, God has revealed His great passion to give His Very Self to the world. From the beginning, God has made it clear that He intends to fill the whole created order with His glory, with all that makes God be God. This effusion does not make us weird. It makes us human! We are finally human We are finally what we were created to be when filled with and animated by the life of the Triune God.

SO, Who is He? This Jesus we are seeking to follow in the city? God-to-the-rescue. Come as the Lamb to take away the sin of the world. And come to baptize ...to baptize again and again ... in and with the Holy Spirit.

And WHENEVER He does, says William Barclay, here enters into our helplessness and fatigue “a surge of new life,” and we are freshly empowered “to do the un-do-able, to face the un-face-able, to bear the un-bear-able.” [Matthew, Vol. I, 49]

I know. Blessed be His name. “Through all its pulses move ...one holy passion filling all my frame.” So, sadly, out of fear, many settle for what Michael Green calls “a low level of spirituality.” We try to domesticate the Spirit, choosing the comfort of the predictable, even if it is unfulfilling.

BUT we NEED NOT fear the effusion. For the simple reason that we were made for this!

From the beginning of creation, God has revealed His great passion to give His Very Self to the world. From the beginning of creation, God has made it clear that He intends to fill the whole created order with His glory. We were made for the best baptism.

For years Michael Cassidy of South Africa played a leading role in the work of reconciliation throughout the African continent. At one point he became aware of how he was quenching and grieving the Spirit by his critical, judgmental attitude toward another leader of the movement. So he did what the Gospel calls us to do –he reached to the other leader in love, asking for forgiveness. Later that night, alone in his hotel room, he found himself “strangely alive.” Although exhausted from all his work – “strangely alive.”

Cassidy describes the moment this way:

“He (the Spirit) seemed to be bubbling up from within, surrounding from without, ascending from below, descending from above.” Jesus had done it again – He had baptized His disciple again. Bubbling up from within, surrounding from without, ascending from below, descending from above.

So, Who is He? Who is this Jesus we are seeking to follow in the city? He is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. The One Who baptizes ... again and again ... in and with the Holy Spirit. And whenever He does, says William Barclay, there enters into our helplessness and fatigue “a surge of new life.” And we are freshly empowered “to do the undoable, to face the unfaceable, to bear the unbearable” (Matthew, Vol. I, 49).

“Through all its pulses move ...one holy passion filling all my frame.”

Blessed be His name!