

## Through the Waters

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 17th Sunday after Pentecost, September 26, 1993. Scripture Lessons: Exodus 14:19-31; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Matthew 28:1-10.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

"I do not want you to be unaware" Paul says. "I do not want you to be unaware, ... that our ancestors... passed through the Sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Paul is referring to Israel when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He's referring to the Red Sea crossing. "They all passed through the Sea, and all were baptized into Moses... and in the sea." Paul is drawing an analogy between baptism and the Red Sea crossing. He wants us to be aware of the connection between baptism and this Old Testament event. What happens to us in baptism is like what happened to our spiritual ancestors when they escaped slavery in Egypt by crossing the Red Sea.

1. But in what ways is the Red Sea crossing like baptism? For one thing, the Red Sea crossing is like baptism in that, in both, the children share the experience with their parents. What happened to the parents, happened, also to their children. "I want you to be aware that ~~all~~ Israel passed through the sea and were baptized into Moses and in the sea." The important word is "all". Israel was made up, not only of adult men and women who believed in the Lord, but their children as well. God's covenant relationship with Israel included the children. God didn't limit his relationship only to those who were old enough to believe and obey. God included the infant children of believers within the covenant. When Paul speaks of Israel, he's talking about adult men and women who had, personally, trusted in Moses to

lead them. But he's also talking about their little boys and girls. The men and women didn't leave their children in Egypt until they were old enough to decide for themselves whether or not they wanted to leave. They didn't leave them in Egypt until they were old enough to believe. They carried their infant children as they passed through the sea. "All passed through the Sea, and all were baptized into Moses."

When God calls us to follow Jesus, he wants us to take our children with us. Long before our children can understand, or personally respond to the Gospel, or trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior they are carried in the arms of their parents through the waters of baptism and into the congregation of God's people. The children of believers share the experience of baptism with their parents.

So often I hear parents say, "Little Johnny doesn't like to go to Sunday School or church." Most children don't like to go to Sunday School and Church. I imagine that if those ancient Israelite moms and dads, our spiritual ancestors, had asked their children, "Do you want to come with us through the Red Sea?" they would have taken one look at the walls of water towering on either side and said, "No way! Don't make us go! Please! I'm scared." I'm sure that many of those children were carried, crying, by their parents through the pathway in the Red Sea. It was a new and scary experience for all of them.

Our children are probably going to be a little scared the first times they go to Sunday School and Church. Most normal children would rather stay in Egypt. Most normal children would rather stay at home and watch t.v. or play the Nintendo than

come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They'll become worldly

go to Sunday School and Church. But they'll never be free to follow Christ if we allow them to do that. They'll never leave Egypt. They'll absorb the dominant values of a culture that doesn't put God first. They'll, most likely, never really come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They'll become worldly conformists; accepting the world as it is rather than longing to see God's Kingdom come and God's will done. God doesn't want us to stay in Egypt and God doesn't want us to leave our children there.

2. Now, I want you to notice another parallel between baptism and the Red Sea crossing. Paul says that all Israel "were baptized into Moses and... in the sea." All Israel passed through the Red Sea on dry land but all were baptized. They were all baptized in the sea, but none of them were immersed. The only people who were immersed were the soldiers in the armies of Egypt. They were immersed but they weren't baptized in the sea. The children of Israel were not immersed, but they were all baptized into Moses and in the sea.

Immersion is not required for Christian baptism. Baptism, in the Bible, doesn't always refer to immersion. Baptism by immersion is a powerful image symbolizing our dieing with Christ and being raised to a new life, but it isn't the only proper way to baptize. If baptism by immersion were that important to Paul, he certainly wouldn't have used the Old Testament story of Israel passing through the Red Sea on dry land to symbolize baptism. Immersion is not necessary. Water is necessary. And, for adults, faith in Jesus Christ is necessary.

Presbyterians baptize by sprinkling, pouring water or immersing in water. The

manner of baptism is not important as long as you are baptized into Christ. Just as the Old Testament people of God were baptism into Moses and in the sea, we Christians must be baptized into Jesus Christ as well as with water. What does it mean to be baptized into Jesus? It means to have a sincere a lively faith in Jesus; a faith that works; a faith that obeys the Word of God; a faith that trusts in Christ for forgiveness when we sin and fail. If we, as adults, don't have a sincere faith in Jesus Christ, it doesn't make any difference whether you were baptized by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring. What's important is that you trust Christ as your Savior. Just as the Old Testament people of God followed Moses in faith into the wilderness, we Christians follow Christ in our faith journey.

### 3. There's a third parallel between the Red Sea crossing and baptism.

Baptism, like the Red Sea crossing, is only the beginning of our faith journey. As Paul speaks of some of the many dangers, snares, and toils that faced the Old Testament people of God after they were <sup>baptized into Moses and in the sea</sup> ~~saved from Egypt~~ but before they entered ~~the Promised Land~~.

Sometimes we Christians forget that baptism is only the beginning of our journey. I have looked over the baptismal rolls and discover that some parents bring their children to the baptismal font and we never see them again. Some parents must feel that baptism is the beginning and end of their faith journey. Some may even feel that baptism is a kind of magical amulet to ward off evil. But because we trust in Christ we'll experience temptations that those who remain in Egypt do not experience. We'll be tested. We have responsibilities that those

who remained in Egypt do not have. We won't be spared the sad experiences that are common to all people. Some Christians are surprised when they face temptation and difficulties in life as though this sort of thing shouldn't happen to Christians. If the Old Testament experience of the people of God teach us anything, it's that we should expect testings, trials, and temptations.

And yet, Paul says, "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

Friends, parents, grandparents, congregation - all of us take on awesome responsibilities when anyone is baptized, whether they are adults or infants. We take on the responsibility of being their with them when they face these temptations and testings. God uses you and me who welcome these little ones into the church, this morning, to help our brothers and sisters in Christ through the tough times, enabling them to endure.

Let us pray: Loving God, you nurture and guide us like a father and mother. We pray for the families of this congregation, and for all Christian families everywhere. Give them strength to honor you in their homes, and to love and serve each other. Help all who have been baptized in your name to live in peace and unity as sisters and brothers in the household of faith, and to serve others in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.