

Baptized into One Body

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Pentecost Sunday, May 30, 1993.
Scripture Lessons: Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:13-13; John 20:19-23; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b.

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

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ: I want to direct your attention to one verse that Paul wrote to Christians living in the Greek city of Corinth. He wrote, "...in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." I want to relate what he said to what we'll be doing in about ten minutes when I baptize Lauren, Whitney, Joshua, Molly, David, and Elena. After I've baptized them I will be able to say to them and of all of us who've been baptized, "...in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

1. Notice first that Paul says, "We were all baptized into one body".

Notice to you a private note. We've baptized into Christ's body, the church. The great heresy of American popular religion is that religion is a private affair. The great heresy is that we can be a good Christian outside the body of Christ. For the past few years, the pollsters have been telling us that Americans are very "religious". More than 90 percent of the Americans polled say they believe in God. But only about half of them say they're active in any organized religious group.

As George Gallup observed recently, "Americans are believers but not joiners." Oftentimes these believers feel that Christianity is nothing more than a set of rules like being honest, being a good person, and doing good. But the Bible tells us that the Christian faith means being joined to the Body of Christ. We can't claim to be "in Christ" without being in the "body of Christ." There's no such thing as a solitary Christian.

- The body into which we are baptized is made up not just of the living & dead. But all the ones who have lived in the past. This is something Paul often ignores.

How do we learn what it means to be a member of a family? We learn by eating together, studying together, playing together, celebrating together. ^{working together -} In the same way we can't learn what it means to be a Christian in isolation from our spiritual family. ^{(in the same way,} We learn what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ, ^{a Christian,} through participation in the life of the Body; through Sunday School, corporate worship, youth ministry, church family night suppers, prayer groups, participation in service activities such as feeding hungry people, and learning how to share the Christian faith with friends and neighbors.

We learn what it means to be a Christian through participation in the Body of Christ, the Church ^{though only some are baptized; a shut-in; making a covenant with on a reception following a funeral.}

God loves these children whom I will soon baptize. God has great plans for their lives. But they'll need the rest of us to tell them the Story, and, from time to time, to remind them who they are, and to keep them in God's family. Who of you will take a joyful interest in one of these families and their children? Who of you will watch over these families and their children to help keep them in God's family?

So that's the first thing I want you to understand. "We were all baptized into one body". Baptism places us into the Body of Christ the Church.

2. Now notice, secondly, that Paul says, "In the one Spirit we were all baptized... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

Jamie Haughwout, a young member of my church in Reedsville, Pennsylvania came to me one evening, twenty years ago. "I've been baptized in the Spirit", he said joyfully. "I've received the gift of speaking in tongues."

I said, "That's great, Jamie. I'm really happy for you. But guess what? You'll never believe this but I've also been baptized in the Holy Spirit."

"O, wow," he exclaimed as he embraced me with a warm hug which made me feel a little uncomfortable since I'm not very much of a touchy, feely person.

"When did it happen to you?" he asked.

"On Easter Sunday when I was about eight months old", I said. "Rev. Adams took me in his arms, poured water over my head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He prayed for the Holy Spirit to descend upon me and remain with me forever and God answered his prayer because years later, when I was in my first year of seminary, I ~~knelt~~ ^{confessed That Jesus is Lord} before the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church in Princeton, New Jersey and ~~confessed that "Jesus is Lord!"~~ ^{I knelt and} ~~knelt and~~ ^{The Rev. Dr. Donald Meisel} placed his hands on my head and prayed, 'O Lord, uphold Ted by your Holy Spirit. Daily increase in him your gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy and peace, both now and forever' ^{The answer to} Rev. Adams' prayer for the Holy Spirit to descend upon me was confirmed when I publicly confessed that Jesus is Lord."

"That's not what I mean by baptism in the Spirit", Jamie responded

I knew it wasn't what he meant but listen to what Paul wrote. "... in the one Spirit we were all baptized." We were all baptized in the one Spirit. All! Not just people who speak in tongues. Paul was writing to Christians who claimed that only those ~~Christians~~ who had the more flashy gifts of tongues were baptized in the Spirit and gifted. But Paul says, "No!" "There are varieties of gifts... there are varieties of services... there are varieties of activities... to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... for in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

Summary (1) Baptized into One Body
(2) Baptized³ in Two Spirits all are gifted

What does this mean in practical terms? It means that all of us are gifted, not just those who have the spectacular gifts of healing and tongues. In the public school system some children are designated as gifted children. They're given special attention. But in the Body of Christ, the Church, we're all gifted, from the youngest to the oldest; from the least educated to the most educated; from the mentally retarded to geniuses. We're all gifted! ALL! You are gifted.

But one of the greatest tragedies in the church is that all Christians don't use the variety of gifts God gives us for the common good. If each one of us used the gifts God has given us for the common good this church would be a Spiritual powerhouse. If we all used the gifts God has given us I'm convinced that there would not be one hungry person in Oxford. There would be no homeless people. There would be no unemployed people. Nobody would be able to reject Jesus as Lord by pointing to us and saying, "Boy! I know what a Christian is I don't want to be one." There'd be no lonely shut-ins waiting for a visit or phone call. There would be all kinds of youth leaders and activities for all our young people, not just junior and senior highs. People who don't know Christ as Savior and Lord would hear the Gospel being shared in ways they could understand from ordinary church members and they would believe. This building would become a house of prayer for all people. "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" and out of our hearts would flow rivers of living water to cleanse and refresh and renew this town.

Let us pray: Gracious God, the Giver of all good gifts, by your grace we were all baptized in the one Spirit into one body and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Keep us all in the faith and communion of your Church. Send us into the world to witness to your love. Enable us to use whatever gifts you have given us for the common good. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with you, our Father, and the Holy Spirit, be the glory and the praise, both now and evermore. Amen.