



April 6, 2017

“What then is the significance of Baptism with water?”

[Read Luke 19:1-10](#)

I once saw a sign above the door of a church nursery. The sign quoted First Corinthians fifteen, verse fifty-one: “*I shall tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.*”

I love the humor of that sign. But many people do not believe that it applies to anyone outside of that nursery. Can people really change? Most people these days answer with a resounding “No!” There is a cynical bite in the air of our culture. “Once a bad apple, always a bad apple” is a prevailing view. It makes me sad to think we are surrounded by such bitter pessimism.

“What does Baptism with water signify?” Luther asks in his *Small Catechism*. He writes that Baptism with water is a sign that the old person within us is drowned daily. Along with that old are put to death the powers of sin that seek to enslave us. This baptism means that a new person is raised up daily to live in God’s presence forever in righteousness and purity.

What does Baptism with water signify? It is a sign that God thinks people can really change. No, that’s not quite right. It is a sign that God knows people can really be changed.

The story of Zacchaeus is one of the high points of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The “wee little man” of Jericho was certainly looking for something that day when Jesus passed. Was it a better view of the parade? Was it a better way to live? Who knows where he started the day. But we know how the day came to a conclusion.

Zacchaeus experienced God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness in Jesus. “Come down here!” Jesus called to him. “For I must eat at your house today.” Zacchaeus stood as far outside the circle of grace as anyone could—traitor to his own people, collaborator with the enemy, thief and thug, marauder and murderer. I imagine people were quite sure that he could never, ever change. Perhaps when they received back double what he had taken or four times what he had stolen, they had some second thoughts.

Here is the daily hope of baptism. God sends the healing Holy Spirit of Jesus into our hearts. And we can be changed. The real nature of hope is simple—there is still a way forward. Despair is the conviction that nothing can ever be changed. In despair we believe we are helpless victims, that every door has been closed, that the only destination is destruction. Hope says we can do something about our situation. Hope says there is another path forward. Hope says that the future is with Jesus.

Do you want to be changed? Pray for the healing Holy Spirit to make you new. And then start to live that way today!

Let’s pray. God of grace and glory, in Holy Baptism you free us from the powers that want us dead. Change us daily into Jesus’ image and likeness. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Do something: Pick a new habit that will build your faith, hope and love. Perhaps it’s time to find a new devotional book to start using in the Easter season!

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