

SUMMARY: SO WHAT IS YOUR BAPTISM ABOUT?

Mark 1:4-11; Acts 19:1-7

It was at Ephesus that we're told Paul met this group of self-identifying new Christian disciples who, though they claimed to have been baptized, confessed that they'd never even heard of the Holy Spirit. And so Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus, and they received the gift of the Spirit. It seems that it's possible to associate ourselves with a movement, to know some things about it, carry the name, wear the T-shirt, even develop some very real loyalty to it, but still not catch what it's actually all about ...to miss the point! **What a realization this is: that the very thing to which we've been giving our loyalty may actually be about something infinitely MORE profound than what we've ever believed.**

Those disciples believed they were Christians - though apparently Paul wasn't convinced! We not sure what it was that made Paul stop to question them: *something in their behaviour perhaps? Something that they either were doing or perhaps were not doing that didn't quite seem to add up?* Whatever it was, it led him to ask in vs 2: ***“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?”*** I wonder what caused him to ask that? What does the Holy Spirit do in disciples that was apparently missing in them? *What aspects of Christian-witness did Paul expect but were just not there?* We're not told, but their response was enough to confirm Paul's suspicions. ***“No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”*** Which led Paul to go on: Well then, ***“Into what were you baptized?”*** Paul was wanting to know what they understood to be their *raison d'etre* - *what did they believe/understand was the whole point of their faith: ...their 'reason for being'.* When they spoke about their baptism as being simply of John the Baptist, Paul points out how that was not good enough. *Notice it was NOT that he thought what they believed was necessarily bad, just that it did not go far enough - it was not what Paul knew Christianity to be.* John's baptism called them to stop one way of living, and come to be aligned in Christ with something altogether different! *Unless they did so, the implication is that they were not yet Christ followers!* Paul was insisting that for them (or for anyone else for that matter) to be a Christ-follower they needed firstly to receive the Baptism of Jesus Christ and so be filled by the Holy Spirit.

They got it. They received that baptism, and as Paul laid his hands on them, scripture tells us, they were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in tongues!

Now what could these texts mean for us as we begin our journeys into this New Year?

What I do NOT believe is that Paul was making some pedantic point re the nitty gritty of our baptism liturgies! No! Instead, by speaking about *'baptism' in Jesus'* I believe Paul is speaking about the process of our *needing to be submerged into/ our coming to be aligned with the teachings/the ethos/milieu of Jesus Christ*, and all of what HE makes apparent! It's as if there are other options which we may choose – *other lights by which we may choose to see our worlds – ways which we may assume are Christian* – but which are actually quite false/ even fraudulent! Christianity is NOT the dualistic good/bad, in/out, exclusivist, racist, misogynist, xenophobic, homophobic, power-seeking thing that we so often have allowed it to become – ...guilt-trip laying, mind-manipulating... **Is that any part of what you are still allowing yourselves to believe it is?**

There's SUCH a warning here for us: we may truly believe that we *know* what being a Christ-follower is all about – but then – like those 12 disciples Paul met - we have our eyes opened & we begin to realize again how it's actually about so much infinitely better! All who have been '*baptized into Jesus*' and '*filled by the Spirit*' have certain anointed characteristics associated with their life-perspectives! It seems there are certain perspectives/ perceptions/ attitudes/ insights, motivations and then actions which must mark them: a very real caring, an inclusive respect, a reverence!

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER PAUL'S QUESTION? IN WHOSE 'NAME' DOES YOUR LIVING APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED? WHAT IS MOST ESSENTIAL ABOUT YOUR CHRISTIAN FAITH?

I know that different people may answer this differently, but wherever it may land for others, for me Christianity is NOT just about trying to do the right things, or even just about trying to be a good person (*though of course there's nothing wrong with either of those*), and it's certainly not EVER about having judgmentally 'to be down' on any who may be different from me. Instead, it has to do with discovering what God has revealed and continues to reveal in Jesus Christ about ourselves/ others/ all of creation and then living lives that express that!

It's about our moving beyond the self-preserving, self-obsessiveness that we call sin and coming instead to know what Truth God's Holy Spirit is sealing even now into our very beings: *that we are beautiful! Created in God's image! God-drenched!* And not just for me/us but all of creation, EVERYTHING! EVERYWHERE!

Our Christian faith is about the recognizing of all of our Best selves, our Truest selves, the reclaiming of Soul-selves. It's about our appreciation of God's beautiful and unifying infusion of sacred Oneness, Wholeness, Holiness in all creation & everything, now unveiled/ exposed.

This is what the living and dying Jesus secured, and it's what the risen Christ still does/still reveals. Richard Rohr speaks of our Christian experience as an '*unveiling*' – *a kind of 'recognition-event'*. He quotes his friend and colleague Cynthia Bourgeaultⁱ who explores how this awareness is '*a Gospel phenomenon*' *one that takes place repeatedly, especially for Jesus. When people are attuned and awake, (she says) reality is often "unveiled" for them.*

THAT's what it means for us to be 'baptized-in-the-name-of-Jesus' Christians in 2021... And then it's about our living lives that give expression to that most beautiful and just and true reality!

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ⁱ Cynthia Bourgeault, [*The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind—a New Perspective on Christ and His Message*](#) (Shambhala: 2008), 2, 3–4, 7.