

## A CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM AT IHOP-NORTHWEST

I'm excited that we are having our first baptism service at IHOP-Northwest this coming Sunday, June 5, as part of our Family Day celebration. In preparation for this, I want to look at a couple of ideas that are important for our understanding of what baptism means.

As I was growing up in the Church, baptism basically carried the implication of a membership ritual, a rite of passage that in our little denomination predictably happened to young people finishing the eighth grade! Rarely did I see anyone baptized before or after that time.

As I look back on that total misunderstanding of baptism, I'm delighted to realize the truth of what it means for us as believers. Baptism is one of the sacraments of the Body of Christ, what I call a "predictable power encounter" in which the Holy Spirit breaks the power of sin in our lives, and infuses into us the ability to say no to sin, to resist temptation and walk in holiness.

This is such good news, because every sincere follower of Jesus that I know deeply wants to be free from sin. We want to get rid of the patterns of sin that systematically destroy our lives, as well as to be free from the occasional sin that trips us up and causes us to feel defiled and ugly.

The New Testament idea of baptism is rooted in the Old Testament experience of Moses leading the Israelites through the Red Sea, where the Egyptian army was then drowned. In 1 Corinthians 10, we're told that through that experience, the Israelites were "baptized into Moses," and the promise of the Lord to them was "*the Egyptians you see today, you shall see again no more forever*" (Exodus 14:13). The power of baptism was that the influence of evil that is represented by Egypt would no longer have control over the people of God, but that they were now entering into a new power, the power to obey the Lord and live holy lives. Although they would still have to choose righteousness and obedience to the Lord, the power of the enemy was broken, and they no longer needed to fear being taken captive again.

Paul the Apostle writes essentially the same thing in Romans 6, where he declares that when we are baptized, we are joined with Jesus in His death, and the power of sin is broken in us. When we are baptized, we are immersed under the water as a spiritual picture of death and burial, and then we are brought up out of the "water grave" into a new life where victory and power over sin are available through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Notice (this is important!): baptism does not make sin impossible; it makes obedience possible. When we get saved, baptized, and filled with the Holy Spirit, the power to choose is restored to us. Sin and death no longer are our lords, but Jesus steps into that place. We have the resource to say "no!" to sin, and to say "yes!" to God.

Even as Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit when He came up out of the water, so we can anticipate a flooding of the Spirit's presence in us – a predictable power encounter that releases to us the power of new life. We can now do what Paul exhorts us to do: "*Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies, that you should obey its lusts. And do not present your members (body parts) as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members (body parts) as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion (lordship) over you, for you are not under law but under grace (the power to choose holiness)*" (Romans 6:12-14).

If you would like to be baptized at our Family Day Celebration this Sunday, June 5, please call the IHOP-Northwest office at 253-509-4958 and give us your information so that we can prepare. Blessings on you all!

Gary Wiens