

John 17:6-19

(Jesus said), "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."



Thank you,
Jesus God Spirit who is Holy on us. Anointing us with amazing
love. You dug a dwelling place and settled tenaciously forever
amen with us. Thank you Jesus God Spirit who is Holy on us for
your incredible grace. Amen

(Ann Weems)

"Blooming Like A Flower"

They are like trees planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither,
in all that they do, they prosper.

Psalm 1:3

Q. What is baptism? (from the UCC booklet, 'Getting Ready for Baptism')

A. Baptism is the sacrament by which a person is initiated into the Church and into its faith, life, and hope.

Q: What is a 'sacrament'?

A: A sacrament is a visible act done by human beings in which God is at work. In the United Church of Christ, we have two sacraments, baptism and communion. We also have rituals, like marriage, confirmation, and services of thanksgiving for the life of someone who has died.

Q: What happens when someone is baptized?

A: During worship, promises are made by the person being baptized (or their sponsors or parents), and promises are made by the people of the church. The promises are about loving God and following Jesus and helping each other to do that. Water is blessed with prayer, and at the moment of baptism, the minister says words like this, or something similar: I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is an identity Sacrament of Christ's Church which gives a person the religious name of Christian. Historically speaking the church universal has not been of one mind concerning its the meaning and how to practice it.

Q: I've heard that some churches immerse a person in a pool of water or even a river for baptism, while others just sprinkle them with a little water. Which one is right?

A: Both are. While different churches have different traditions and practices the real point isn't the amount of water. It's the amount of God. God promises to be fully present in the Church's sacrament of baptism.

Q: But why water?

A: Lots of reasons. God's Spirit moved over the waters at creation (Genesis 1). John the Baptist baptized Jesus with water. And water means so many things: birth, death, washing, cleansing, forgiveness, life and growth. Moreover, water is both ordinary, a part of daily life, and yet also extraordinary, a wonderful gift without which there is no life. (ibid)

In his reflection, 'Double-dipped' (ibid) Quinn Caldwell reflected on his baptism.' Though my parents raised us in the church, they wanted us to make our own decisions about whether to be baptized. As a young adult, I took the plunge (metaphorically; mine was a sprinkling church). Some years later, my dear old grandmother made a confession. It turns out that she, convinced that my parents were putting her grandchildren's wee souls in danger of perdition by not baptizing us as babies, had baptized each one of us over her kitchen sink a few days after our birth. "Desperate times call for desperate measures," she finished with a firm nod. I was in seminary at the time, and was full of chagrin as I counted all the rules that had been broken. One: I was baptized not just in private, away from a congregation, but in secret. Two: It happened without the consent or knowledge of those responsible for me. Three: It was done based on a belief that neither my parents nor I hold. Four: Worst of all, I've been double-dipped. Looked at this way, it could not have gone more wrong. Looked at another way, though, it really couldn't have been more right. One: My parents thought carefully about their children's baptism, and made a decision that had integrity. Two: though my grandmother did overstep her bounds, she did it for love and for grandchildren she believed to be in extremis. Three: Knowing my grandmother, I guarantee you that no font in any church in the land has witnessed a baptism sweeter or gentler (or crazier) than the ones witnessed by Grandma Stell's kitchen sink. Four: In the fullness of time, having been loved and raised by these people who took baptism so seriously, I came to ask for it on my own, which means that something worked. So, yeah, I've been baptized all wrong and way too much. But it came from the shower of love that the people around me were pouring down on me-- which is just what baptism is anyway. So there's no chagrin here anymore. I've learned that God cares way less about rules than I do, and that there can never be too much love poured out on the world.

In John's gospel we find Jesus praying to God that his followers might continue to pour out Holy Love into the world through them after his death. In his prayer he boldly reminded God of God's promise to bring their faith into the full bloom of Unity and Holiness. "You have given, you have sent, you have loved: now keep, sanctify, let them be one. . . ." According to this gospel writer, each time Jesus talks about being 'one' he's speaking about intimacy, about the way he and the Father are one, and how Christians are drawn into closeness to God because we

know Jesus. In his reflection entitled, 'A Letter From a Father to His Son', Rev. Martin Copenhaver wrote: Dear Todd, I want you to understand how significant it is that your mother and I brought you to the church to be baptized. Like most parents, we feel protective of you. A day or two after you were born we brought you home in a big plastic bucket they gave us at the hospital. It was battleship gray and seemed as sturdy as a battleship also. It was filled like a nest with brightly colored blankets so that you could stay warm and your head wouldn't flop around. I'm sure that, if we had any, we also would have used some of those Styrofoam peanuts that are used for packing fragile and precious items. We buckled that car seat in just right and made sure that it was secure, as carefully as if we were sending you to the moon in a space capsule. And then we drove home more slowly than you have ever seen me drive since. For the most part, that loving, protective concern doesn't change all that much as you get older. So, for instance, before we drop you off somewhere, we want to know something about who will be in charge. After all, in some way we are entrusting you to their care, if only for a time. We won't entrust you to just anyone. So it is significant that, on the day of your baptism, in the most profound way, we entrusted you to the God we know in Jesus Christ. We love you so much, and so want good things for you. We also want you to be safe and to be cared for. And on the day of your baptism we said something like this: "We entrust this little one to Jesus. In this dangerous and treacherous world, it is to the care of Jesus that we entrust this beloved son of ours." Love, D. (ibid)

Baptism is only the beginning of a Christian's spiritual journey of entrusting oneself into Jesus' care. Before we can call him our BFF we need to know important things about him. Kids start asking at an early age. "Who was Jesus' mommy and daddy?" "Did he have any friends?" "Is Jesus a stronger super-hero than Iron Man?" "Did Jesus do magic like Harry Potter?"

Q:(five year old) 'Jesus died when a cross fell on him. Right?'

A: (five year old cousin): "No. Let's go read about how it happened in my Bible that I got when I was baptized.

The only place that Jesus' life story is recorded is in the Bible. That's why souls who want to know the Jesus they never met and be like a tree planted by streams of living water which yields fruit in its season, study the gospels together in church. And that why we sing: The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me, it stands alone on the Word of God, the B-I-B-L-E.