

Baptism sermon
All Saints Anglican Church Waitara
www.waitara.anglican.asn.au
Bruce Stanley

III – (PPT – map)

* **Slide 1**: This is a PHOTO showing where our church is. It's an aerial photograph. An actual picture of our suburb.

* **Slide 2**: This is a MAP showing our church. It shows the same place, but a *map* uses symbols and signs that show us where things are. We use maps to get us from one place to another because they're easier to follow than a photo. And we know what's on this page are signs and symbols. The roads aren't *actually* yellow or white or orange, with writing on them.

And we know they're drawn to *scale*. The streets aren't actually 5 mms wide.

Maps are essential symbols on a page. They aren't REALITY. They're not even like a photo. They use symbols to give us a clear picture of reality in a way we can understand. And maps like this are *effective* in the way they use symbols, because they help us get from one place to the other. But we need to be able to read and understand the symbols properly when we use them. Something I often fail to do when I pull out my street directory and read it upside down!

I want us to think this way today as we talk about Baptism – we have to talk in a bit of an *abstract* way. Because Baptism is a *sign*. And we need to understand the symbols in we want to understand the sign. The Bible talks about Baptism as an important thing. Jesus was Baptised. Jesus commands us to be baptised, and he commands us to Baptise others who believe in him.

So we're going to talk about **what Baptism IS, what it ISN'T, and what we should DO with it.**

So, what IS it?...

* **... it's a sign**

The Anglican Church calls the sign of Baptism a *sacrament*. In the Anglican Church, there are two sacraments: Baptism and The Lord's Supper – or "Communion". A sacrament is simply a sign or ceremony that Jesus DID and he commanded us to KEEP DOING. Jesus did both Baptism and Communion and he also commanded us to keep doing them.

But Baptism, like Communion, is more than *just* a sign or ceremony. Baptism is a sign. It's a symbol. It's a ceremony. But it's *more* than that.

* **III** – (Prop – rego papers) Imagine you go out and buy a car. You don't just hand the person money and drive away. A transaction happens. You pay them money. Then they take the registration papers of the car, and they *sign them over to you*. And you go to the motor registry with those papers, and they *transfer* the registration of the car into *your name*. That transaction is a ceremony. That piece of paper that is signed is a symbol – it's not the actual car is it? You didn't pay for the rego papers. They are a *symbol* of the ownership of the car. A very effective symbol. It means something. Even though you've paid for the car and you technically own it already, that "transfer" effectively recognises **what has been done**. it recognises that you own the car. What happens if those papers aren't signed over? What if you paid for the car and you don't sign the papers over? Well, the car really is still yours. You own it. You bought it. It's been paid for. **But** you are required to transfer the registration. It's not optional. It's what you are called to do.

Let's talk about Baptism. Baptism happens when a person accepts Jesus as their Lord and Saviour (or for infants, it means the parents accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour on behalf of the child – and

we'll talk a bit about that later). When you accept Jesus as your king and saviour, at that time, you are saved. God has paid the price for your salvation. God has bought you a place in heaven. At that **moment** you turn to him, you are saved. You are saved by his grace. You are saved because of what **Jesus** has done on the cross for you. But THEN, we are called to be Baptised. Why? Why have this ceremony? Are we being legalistic?

* Baptism is a sign, but it's also the sign that Jesus **commands** us to do. In Matthew 28, Jesus commands us to be Baptised and to Baptise others who believe in him. And all through books like Acts, we see Jesus' followers following this command.

And if Jesus **commands** it, there must be a good reason. And the reason is because Baptism is not just a sign, it's an **effective** sign. Let me outline 3 of those effects:

* 1. First of all, it's effective because it allows a person to **express their relationship with God**. It's a time to show people that you have accepted Jesus as Lord. This is a great thing to be able to do. But it's not the **only** reason.

* 2. It's an effective sign because of the symbols that are used. The water used in Baptism is effective in helping us to understand what actually happened when God made us his child. He washed us from our filth and sin. He gave us new life. The word Baptism means to be "overcome". Washing is the symbol that we have been **overcome by the Holy Spirit** in our life.

* 3. Finally, and most importantly, the sign of Baptism is effective because it's a blessing that God has given us. It is the symbol that **God** has given us to show that our **ownership has been transferred**. We now belong to God, not the world. And Baptism is a blessing because it is **the** sign that God has chosen to give us a deeper understanding of our relationship with him.

But also remember our other reading today – Jesus is actually Baptised himself! In Matthew 3:13. WHY was Jesus baptised? For the same three reasons we just mentioned –

- It expresses his relationship with God the Father.
- It's a sign of being overcome by the Holy Spirit.
- And it's an effective sign to show WHO Jesus belongs to.

So, Baptism is a sign. It's a command. What else is it?

* **...it's a covenant**

In Acts 2:38-39, Peter addresses a crowd on the day of Pentecost. 50 days after Jesus ascended. When he taught the people about who Jesus was, they asked: What should we do? And:

** "38Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

The promise is for you and your children. Baptism is a covenant promise. Just as circumcision was for the Jews in the Old Testament. And in Acts 16 and 1 Corinthians 1, we have several examples of whole families Baptised. Baptism is an **effective sign** for children as well because it demonstrates the covenant promise of God to his people, and their children.

So, Baptism is a sign, a command, and a covenant. But what **isn't** baptism?

What is it NOT?

Let me just talk about two things.

First, Baptism is not a magical act.

Baptism doesn't MAKE a person a believer. Baptism is not HOW we are saved. Baptism needs to **follow** faith. There is nothing magical about the water or the words that are used. It is a ceremony

that brings to us, in a very real and meaningful way, the promises of God that we have already accepted. Salvation first. Baptism follows. And Baptism isn't proof of someone being a Christian. The sign of Baptism is only effective as a sign if there is faith.

If someone is Baptised without faith, or Baptises their child when they themselves don't have a faith, then that sign of Baptism is useless. It is "**ineffective**". Just like a marriage vow is useless if the people don't love each other and don't intend to keep their vows. Just like if someone steals the registration papers for a car. It doesn't MAKE it their car. You can't steal salvation or fake it. Often, the only person who knows if Baptism is an effective, true sign, is that person and God. And sometimes, if perhaps we doubt a person's faith when they are baptised, we need to remember that it is **God** who judges, not us.

* **Second**, baptism isn't "the final act". Just because you got "done" when you were a child or as an adult, doesn't mean you sit back and do nothing and you're going to heaven no worries. We're called to live out our faith in action. And to build up and strengthen each other in our faith. And to the parents especially – we're called to **raise our children in faith**.

* Prov 22:6: "*6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*"

So the final question is simply:

* **What do we do with Baptism now?**

Two options really:

* 1. We can respond by saying "It's just another ceremony. It's just a thing that people do. It can be nice and helpful, but it's really just a nice thing to do. Do it or don't do it – doesn't matter."

But the thing is that God has given us this special sign of Baptism. It's a sign that he's given to us in order to strengthen us and confirm to ourselves and the world that our faith is in Jesus and our confidence is in God's promises. Baptism is not **just** a sign or a ceremony. It's given to us by God, commanded by Jesus and an effective sign of our covenant relationship with Him. Without it, we are missing out on something that God has given us to strengthen and confirm our faith.

So perhaps the better option is

* 2. to embrace it like the Ethiopian Eunuch did. He confessed his faith in Jesus and couldn't wait to receive the promised sign of Baptism.

- A sign that expressed his relationship with God

- A sign that effectively shows how he has been overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit in his life and washed clean of his sin.

- And a sign that effectively demonstrated that the ownership of his life had been transferred from the world to the Lord Jesus.

I believe in signs and symbols and ceremonies. Like funerals, marriage ceremonies, wedding rings, marriage certificates, graduations, pieces of paper with a degree written on them, car registration papers, title deeds to a house, birthday parties. Symbols, ceremonies, signs – they point us towards things that are important. Especially Baptism. Because Jesus commanded it, **and** because it's a blessing in our covenant relationship with God.

Let's pray.