Text: Baptism, 1 Peter 3:13-22

**Introduction**

Parts of this sermon I suppose I should leave for two weeks hence for confirmation. But I want to start out with the larger picture before focusing more narrowly. And the larger picture is the sacraments in general.

Within the church for 1500 years if you asked how many sacraments there were, the answer would have been 7. Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Ordination, Last Rites, the Lord’s Supper and Marriage. I list them in that order for a Lutheran reason. When you ask how many sacraments of a Lutheran taught with the Small Catechism, you probably get the answer 2. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And that is simply because it’s a definitional game. As those confirmands I would hope would be able to answer, a Lutheran Sacrament is defined by three things.

1. It is for the forgiveness of sins
2. It is instituted by Christ himself
3. It has a physical element.

Hence baptism is the wellspring the next four. Baptism is the Sacrament that forgives sins, is instituted by Christ and in not simple water only, but water is the visible element. Confirmation, Confession, Ordination and Last Rites – all things that Lutherans still practice – are remembrances of one’s baptism. You can see how they cover a lifetime. But there is nothing explicitly new in any of them that is not present in the baptism that all believers are to receive. As I will surely state again in a couple weeks and have told the confirmands multiple time, confirmation is confirming your baptism. Everything your parents and sponsors promised, you confirm and make your own. The same thing is easily said about confession. We have our corporate confession pretty much every week. And the absolution is pronounced and it is real. But it is nothing that you do not already have in your baptism. Likewise by your baptism you are already a royal priesthood. If you think that by an ordination something significant has changed in the person, you are denying your baptism. There are lots of things an ordained ministry was established by Jesus for, but the authority is already present in the priesthood of all believers in that baptism. That’s a deep one and worthy of further thought. It might help the larger church deal with some of its disorders. But that is beyond today’s text. Likewise, the Lord’s Supper and Marriage are for different texts and a different sermon.

Today’s is about that that wellspring sacrament – Baptism.

**Text**

How does the Apostle Peter want us to think about Baptism? Peter makes to us a rather obscure old testament argument piggybacking on the work of Christ.

He starts off with the question: Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? If we lived in a sinless world…If the Kingdom of Heaven was already with us in its fullness…nobody. But it isn’t. And Peter admits this, with some instruction. “But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed.”

If we suffer for doing good, how are we blessed? Peter’s first point of blessing is about fear. “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.” Whether you want to say sin, death and the power of the devil – or The Devil, the world and our sinful nature - these great enemies have already been judged and taken care of. Peter is not there yet, but in baptism you have been saved from their eternal effects. Yes, there are temporal things we will pilot over. Confessions that will need to be given. But confession to place before us what God has already done in our baptisms. Saved us. Have no fear about any of those enemies that would rile up the waters of the world against you. The worst they can do is kill the body. Your soul, you life, is sealed with Christ for eternity. Part of the blessing should the Christian suffer for the name is seeing the promises of God hold true.

Another part of the blessings is that such suffering grants the Christian the opportunity to confess Christ. “Be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Good is of such a transcendent nature that even when it is being reviled it is still recognized. The rage of evil in the world comes from its recognition of the good and its inability to snuff it out.

And the deepest part of the blessing would be what the Apostle Paul would call sharing in the sufferings of Christ or making them full. Peter says, “it is better to suffer for doing good…for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” The death of Christ on that cross opened the way to God for all of mankind. Our sharings in that might just be what opens the eyes and brings not the entire world but one person. I often wonder what role Saul’s witnessing the stoning of Stephen played on his heart. It is what sets him off on his persecution and on the road to Damascus. Paul who talks about everything else, never mentions it beyond his remorse at having persecuted to the church. If a sacrament is the grace of God made real in time, the blessing is a sacramental life. A life for which you have been set apart by your baptism. You have been buried with Christ in your baptism.

And that brings us to the rather obscure Old Testament argument.

Luther asks the question in the catechism, “How can water do such great things?” He reminds us that it isn’t simple water only, it is water combined with the Word. And it is the faith that trusts the Word of God.

The world today is much like the world of Noah. It does not obey – or often even believe or hear the Word of God. The world goes on its way today just as it did right up until the time the rain started. In Noah’s day God’s delay of the judgement was so that the Ark could be built. God’s delay was so that those 8 souls would be brought safely through the waters.

And so it is today. Baptism – Baptism which now saves you – is the Ark which Christ has built. The world continues on in its disobedience. Storing up the wrath of God for all of it. God’s patience waits for the full number to enter the ark. In baptism you have been buried with Christ such that even inf the World puts you to death in the flesh, you have been made alive in the Spirit. And it is that Spirit that lives in you, even though you die, will appeal to God through the resurrection of Jesus. The Ark brough Noah and family safely across the raging waters of the world. Baptism brings you safely across the raging waters of the world. When everything else is being drowned, you have been made alive. If we have been buried with him, we will certainly share a resurrection like his.

Baptism is the Ark Christ has built for his family.

**Christology**

Now all of this could just be a word game. We can easily just treat a baptism as a right of passage. A nice occasion to gather the family together to recognize that it has grown. We might take the form, but ignore the function. That would be like having a ticket to board the ark, and it is already pouring outside, and saying “nah, its going to blow over, or I’ll trust my little pontoon boat.”

Peter reminds us that Christ has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God – with angels, and authorities and powers – all these having been subjected to him. That’s this week, observed next Sunday, the Ascension. Which Peter was a witness to. Just as the Judgement of the Flood was sure – every ancient civilization has a flood story, God leaves traces of his works. The Final judgement of the world is set. Christ has been enthroned at the right hand of God. Today, as before, he awaits the full number to come in. But don’t mistake that delay for lack of authority.

**Moral**

So baptism has saved you. Your live is safe in that Ark from all the roiling seas. Just like God closed the doors after Noah boarded. God intends to keep you safe in this gathering of those in the ark.

That doesn’t keep us from jumping over the sides I guess. If we want to jump back into the flood, we can. And if we are suffering, the temptation will certainly be there.

But that is the call of faith. “In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy…for it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.” The promise is that the ark will deliver you safe to eternal life. The faith is staying in the ark. The faith is recalling the promises when the world is tossing your about.

**Eschatological**

Because the day is coming when waiting patiently is over. The day comes when the victory parade starts. The spirits that think that by suffering or even putting to death God’s family in the flesh they have won, have already heard the proclamation. They will stay in their prison. The people of God are safe and will rise.

Baptism is just such a proclamation. Satan, this one is mine, he is beyond your grasp. Jesus lives, the victory’s won. The Old Adam has been drowns, but the new Adam lives. And you can’t touch the New Adam. Amen.