

A Reflection on the Sacrament of Baptism

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This week I had the pleasure of traveling to San Antonio Texas to attend the Combined Section Meeting of the American Association of Physical Therapy, APTA. This particular convention is designed so that the various special interest groups of the APTA (i.e. neurology, orthopedic, wound care, electrophysiology, research, women's health, etc.) can come together to share, collaborate, celebrate, commiserate, and fellowship together.

As I was looking over the thousands of educational opportunities, one of them caught my eye. It was titled "Aquatic Therapy and the Brain." The description was as follows: "The therapeutic use of aquatic immersion has profound health benefits. Immersion produces important effects upon the autonomic nervous system and upon cerebral blood flow. During this session we will focus on the physiological changes that occur with immersion, producing the cascade of responses that create..." After a few minutes, I realized that I had such a different response to this title than I would have had just a few years ago. Now, this title and its description drew me into theological reflection regarding the Sacrament of Baptism. So, while I participated fully in the convention and all that it had to offer, I spent much of the week reflecting upon the Sacrament of Baptism from a different perspective – the idea of immersion; specifically, immersion that produces a cascade of responses that create.

As fascinating as it was to hear and think of all the physical benefits that are derived from simply immersing others in H₂O, I was continually drawn to consider it from a theological perspective - into the thought that baptism as a reflection of our "immersion" into the Triune God that creates a cascade of beneficial responses, not just for the individual but for all of God's creation. The Sacrament of Baptism as a movement that produces and creates benefits - good.

I started by considering Christ's baptism experience through this lens. In Matthew 3: 13-17 we see that Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized. He, the Son of God, the Incarnate Word came to a human, to be baptized. Then we see movement as he is baptized – "he went up out of the water." Then, as he came up out of the water the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended upon him. Here we see the movement of the Triune God – the Son rising up out of the water, the Father opening up the heavens, and the Spirit descending upon the Son. He moved to humanity, engaged fully in human

action and then the glory of God was revealed. Immersion with cascading responses that brought benefit (good).

Next, I considered the ways that we perform the Sacrament of Baptism. The person moves with others into the baptismal space. The individual moves into the space. The baptism, itself, is full of movement. The person moves out of the baptismal space into the waiting arms of friends, family, etc. Finally, they move into the pews, ministries, and worship experiences of the church.

I then began to consider the movement pattern that was created between the Triune God and the individual. Pre-baptism we have the movement of the Triune God for the benefit of the person. Then, the individual has the ability to move as response to God (repenting, turning to God) and sometimes the individual decides to move and immersed in the Triune God. This immersion into the Triune God creates a cascade of responses/changes that create benefits (good).

Finally, I considered the benefits that can come from all of this movement and this was just a few things that came to mind:

- Movement from death to life;
- Movement into a community (Kingdom of God, the body of Christ, communion with Triune God and others, etc.);
- Movement out of arid/dry places with stagnant waters (wealth, power, etc.) to rivers of living water (the Triune God);
- Movement into an kingdom that transcends, yet connects with the world;
- Movement into a resting position (resting in our Triune God)
- Movement of our attitudes toward peace, joy, goodness, gentleness, self-control, etc. (fruit of the Spirit), toward service, toward humility, etc.
- Movement from an attitude of self-interest to an attitude of self-giving;
- Movement into an infinite, mysterious, glorious relationship with the Triune God and with God's creation.

As I thought about the Sacrament of Baptism as a visual representation of movement – immersion into the Triune God with all the responses/changes and benefits that can come from this movement, I was drawn to the realization that many people view baptism as a moment in time - I know I had for so many years. Yet, the Sacrament of Baptism viewed as movement points to something that does not end or should not end. It points to God's perpetual grace for humanity/creation and God's grace in allowing humanity to be not only partakers but givers of this grace to others. I am not suggesting that an individual

needs to literally come into the baptismal pool over and over and over again. However, I am suggesting that the Sacrament of Baptism points to the importance of maintaining our movement toward God, i.e. prayerful reflection and meditation, repentance, communion, worship, etc; in acknowledgement that God has moved toward his creation. This immersion makes space for the cascading changes/responses to occur which brings benefits (good), not for our own sake (while that may very well happen), but for the sake of God and God's creation so that we can be the light and salt to the world and reveal the gracious nature and glory of our Triune God.

What would happen if the church started to view the Sacrament of Baptism as a visual representation of movement – i.e. immersion in the Triune God, into God's grace, so as to allow a cascade of responses and changes that bring good – that reflect God's glory? What if the Sacrament of Baptism allows us to have a better understanding of the perpetual movement of God's grace upon his creation?

So, what did I come away with on my trip to San Antonio? Immersion brings benefits – goodness. So, enjoy times of immersion whether it is in a bath, hot tub, pool or as I am immersed in the Triune God through living life in the ordinary activities of daily life or as I worship, pray, meditate/reflect of the Word, repent, serve, etc. Enjoy the moments of immersion and rest in the knowledge that goodness of some fashion will be produced, because God's grace is continually poured out.