
Worship in Spirit and Truth:
 “The Sign and Seal of God’s Promise”
 Genesis 15: 1-8, 17: 1-10; Acts 2: 38-3; Galatians 3: 27

Thoughts to Shape and Spark Discussion:

“A sacrament is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of His good will towards us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in turn attest our piety toward Him in the presence of the Lord and of His angels and before men . . . A sacrament is never without a preceding promise but it is joined to it as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself, and of making it more evident to us and in a sense ratifying it. By this means God provides first for our ignorance and dullness, then for our weakness ... as our faith is slight and feeble unless it be propped [up] on all sides and sustained by every means, it trembles, wavers, totters, and at last gives way.” - John Calvin

“Sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness.” - Galway Kinnell

Q: What is baptism?

A: Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's. - *Westminster Shorter Catechism 94*

Themes and Questions to Guide Reflection and Response:

- After reading through the passages together, ask your group what makes an impression upon them from the passages and why it strikes them.
- What has been your experience with the sacraments? How has it changed over the years for you? What about Hope’s practice of the sacraments is challenging or encouraging for you?
- John Calvin makes the assertion that the sacraments are God’s provision for our ignorance, dullness, and weakness - to prop up wavering, trembling, tottering faith. Is this how you think of the sacraments? How are they a prop for weakness and dullness in your Christian life?
- How do Abraham’s searching questions of wanting to experience in a sensible, tangible way the promises of God strike you? Where are you wanting not merely to know intellectually the promises of God but also to experience the promises and grace of God?
- Baptism can be such a line in the sand between Christians. What has been your experience with baptism? Why do you think such this sacrament is so divisive?
- The sermon asserted that the biblical emphasis in the sacrament of baptism is upon passive reception of the welcoming, assuring, and distinguishing mark of God’s covenant. How is that different than declaring/proving something to God and others about the strength of faith? Is there a comfort for you in that distinction?
- What does “improving upon your baptism” look like for you?