

## “Reaffirming Our Baptism”

Mark 1:4-11 *NRSV*; Acts 19:1-7 *The Message*

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New London UMC

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Rituals typically spring from the desire to acknowledge the importance or significance of an action or event. Each of us probably have our own personal rituals that we carry out: whether it is having quiet time with a cup of coffee each morning, or praying before each meal; when we recharge our phones each day; telling our family members we love them at the end of each phone conversation, or before anyone leaves the house for the day; or taking time to reflect on our day by writing in a journal before going to bed each night; or setting out clothes to wear tomorrow before we go to sleep.

In our life together as a church we also have rituals such as: following a familiar order of worship; using a prayer of Great Thanksgiving in the sacrament of Holy Communion; everyone in the congregation renewing their vows during the sacrament of Baptism; the exchange of marriage vows and making a covenant with God in a service of marriage; lifting up prayers of commendation and thanksgiving during a memorial or funeral service. (Some would also say that having a potluck meal is another Methodist ritual.)

But the tricky part of every ritual is *how we participate in it*. Do we just carry a ritual out by rote, without ever thinking about it, or being affected by it? Or do we enter into a ritual “fresh” by opening ourselves up to the experience, and by remembering the importance of establishing the ritual in the first place? Do we understand a ritual as being just a duty to be done; or as being something that we are honored or thankful to be able to do? Our experience of a ritual is always shaped by our expectations, our attitude, our focus, and our level of engagement.

Martin Luther is said to have had a personal ritual of remembering his baptism each morning by making the sign of the cross with water on his head and saying, “God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me.” And whenever Luther was tempted, his conscience whispered or shouted, “Remember your baptism!” Luther also wrote, “So a truly Christian life is nothing other than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever to be continued.” I believe that is primarily because, as Paul told the believers he met in Ephesus, Christian baptism is not the same as John’s baptism which was solely about an individual seeking repentance at a particular point in time. In Christian baptism **WE – all of us** – acknowledge the gift of the Holy Spirit continually at work in and through us.

I invite you to join me in a time of silent prayer to prepare ourselves to be fully and willingly ready to enter into the ritual of reaffirmation of our baptismal covenant – both as individuals and collectively as children of God and members of the Body of Christ. Let us be in prayer. . .

Amen.