



# Sermon Growth Guide

**February 20, 2022**

**Missing Pieces - Washed in the Water**



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### Colossians 2:6-15

**Key Verse:** Colossians 2:12 “... having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

**Big Idea:** As the people of God moved through the parted waters and into God’s freedom, we pass through the waters of baptism into the freedom of the community of faith, into the church.

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## Foundations

A Baptist church in an urban area had limited parking space. During the week, people were tempted to park in the pastor’s space, preventing the pastor from working. So, they put a sign up: No Parking. Violators Will Be Baptized. While humorous, it presented baptism as a punishment. That’s one way of looking at it...

Pastor Tim, however, described serious views of baptism in his sermon before telling us the Reformed understanding of baptism. In Colossians, Paul compared baptism to the rite of circumcision, a mark that one has been born into the family of God. So, the church is not a club we join, but a fellowship into which we have been placed. Baptism is not something we do. It is a gracious gift of God.

In the Revised English Bible, verses 6-7 read: “Therefore, since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, live in union with him. Be rooted in him, be built in him, grow strong in your faith, as you were taught; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness.” Our union in Christ means that we are immersed in Him and that is our real baptism.

One of the ways in which we experience that immersion into Jesus is by being immersed into the church, where we and our children “grow strong in the faith, as we were taught.” Pastor Tim asked: “...have you thrown your entire life into the care and keeping of Jesus Christ...?” Are you immersed in Jesus and His people?

## Understanding God’s Word

When Paul refers to circumcision as the analog to baptism, he is doing several things. First, babies who were circumcised didn’t decide to participate in this rite. It was decided for them. This tells us that God comes for us before we even think about Him. God chooses us before we can respond to the offer of new life in Jesus.

Second, Paul is showing us the unity of the Old and New Testaments when he aligns baptism with circumcision. This means that we can learn from Israel’s experiences. For example, what did Israel do with and for its children who had been marked as belonging to God? Read Deuteronomy 6. In what specific ways can the church follow this model of forming its members as followers of Jesus?

## Applying God’s Word

Martin Luther wrote that “Baptism is not a work that we do but ... a treasure that God gives us and faith grasps. ... In baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and practice all his or her life.” What aspects of your baptism would you like to explore more deeply?

## Witnessing God’s Word

There is a baptismal liturgy that concludes: God has made you a member of the household of God, sharing in the priesthood of Christ. What should that look like in our lives, personally and together?

Pastors across America and around the world are trying to figure out how to encourage their congregations, who are now going to concerts, games, Super Bowls, and everywhere else, to come back to church. This is the not-so-hidden agenda in this series too. Some of you need to be at home—of course, we get that. But many are just plain skipping! Trying on life without church. It's you I'm worried about. You need the gifts God has gathered here. There are gaps, **Missing Pieces** in our lives, things we miss when we don't come to church and don't participate in the body of Christ. Community. Physical touch. Hearing the Word together. We are a body. If one piece is missing, the whole body suffers and fails to function. But one of the most powerful things we miss is the sacraments. We are a sacramental people. We believe in the power of what the Holy Spirit does when we, together, celebrate the Lord's Supper and Baptism. And you don't do this stuff alone at home. **Washed in the Water.** Today we talk about Baptism.

When I was in Chaplain School in the Army at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, we had a two-week field exercise. In July. In South Carolina. The Chaplain Corps had added something to the chaplain field kit—a big plastic bag to dig a hole in the ground and have a full immersion baptism. During the invasion of Baghdad, there was an issue with Soldiers wanting to get baptized and chaplains dipping them in the water tanks, the drinking water! Water tastes worse after you dip a sweaty, unwashed, sand-filled, 20-something warrior in it. Anyway, this was going to solve that. So we dug the hole, laid the plastic in and filled it with water. Then they said, "Who wants to volunteer to try it out?" I knew what I believed about baptism, and I knew that I had been out in the woods on a field exercise with no shower for 12 days in South Carolina in July. I raised my hand. "I'm already baptized, so this doesn't count you know!" I said. My Baptist buddy got down in there with me, dunked me (which felt great), and then when I came up, he said. "Ha! I got you! I said it

while you were under!" Oh well.

What do we believe happens in baptism? Different churches run at this differently, don't they? Some, mostly Catholic and Orthodox churches, see it as a washing away of original sin to allow a child to be part of the church without provoking the wrath of God. On the opposite side are those who see baptism as an emblem of a decision for faith, a way to declare to the world and to yourself that you have chosen Jesus and resolve to live for Him. What do we believe at First Pres? In the Reformed tradition we believe baptism is the entry point into the community of faith. This font is a gateway. As the people of God moved through the parted waters of the Red Sea to escape slavery and move into God's freedom, we pass through the waters of baptism to enter the freedom of Christ in the community of faith. Now this is a tender thing. Even among our elders and pastors we make different decisions about this with our children. And this is a mystery. The early church referred to the sacraments as the "mysteries"—not a puzzle to be solved, but a wonder to admire. Mysteries are vandalized by surety. So I'm not standing here to say this is the only way, but to help you to understand why we do what we do here at First Pres. Let's go to school on this.

For us, the closest analog to baptism is not a public profession of faith, nor is it the washing away of original sin. For us, the closest analog to baptism is circumcision. In fact, it seems to us that Scripture teaches that baptism now takes the place of circumcision—only, joyfully, baptism can be practiced by male and female alike. "In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11–12). In Jesus, as you come to Jesus Christ and you give Him your life, your whole self, not

just in part, but the whole, your whole self, rotten and corrupted in the sin of the flesh, and the patterns and habits of disobedience your flesh has learned, your whole self is cut off and thrown away, is killed, dies, and then is raised to new life in Jesus. Whole self. Like Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). Or this, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Whole self. That’s faith. But I’m getting ahead of myself. What I want you to see here is circumcision becomes baptism.

In the Covenant with Abraham and the people to come from him, God commanded the people to use circumcision as a marker and seal. I don’t know why. Why this and not something else? I don’t know. Nobody does! But there it is. I do know it is a commitment. I was just reading this week about the Passover. To keep the Passover, they roasted a lamb. That’s a lot of meat, so they could share it with family or neighbors, but if someone from a foreign nation wanted to eat some, that’s OK, but “A foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat it” (Exodus 12:48). You don’t just wander into that barbecue! It’s a lifelong commitment. I want from the core of my being to be a part of this people, to be with you and with your God, forever.

Well, like circumcision was to the community of God’s people in the Old Testament, baptism is a marker for our people, including our children, that we belong to Jesus in a world that denies Him. That’s why we baptize babies. The Heidelberg Catechism says: “Should infants also be baptized? Yes, because they, as well as their parents, are

included in the covenant and belong to the people of God. Since both redemption from sin through the blood of Christ and the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit are promised to these children no less than to their parents, infants are also by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, to be incorporated into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the old covenant by circumcision. In the new covenant, baptism has been instituted to take its place.” Where do you get that? It comes from this passage in front of us, where baptism and circumcision are equated, but also from passages like Peter’s speech in Acts, where he explained to the citizens of Jerusalem that the man they just crucified, Jesus, was God’s Son sent for their salvation. They said, “What can we do?” “Peter 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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call’” (Acts 2:38-39).

So, is it weird that we baptize babies? It’s strange, isn’t it, to be a church that believes that salvation depends solely on your faith in Jesus Christ, your personal relationship with him as Savior and Lord, and baptizes babies? Circumcision was mostly for babies. Jesus blessed babies and children, laying a blessing on them as part of the people of God in Mark 10. In Scripture we see whole households being baptized, surely including the infants. In Acts 16 we meet Lydia. “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home” (Acts 16:14-15). As the head of her household, Lydia had the whole household baptized, made part of the people of God. That’s what it says here. Later in that same chapter the same happens with the jailer who asked Paul and Silas what he had to do to be saved: “They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be

saved—you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household” (Acts 16:31-34).

Does that mean they all were saved? Does baptism save you? No. And this is the enormous pitfall of infant baptism, isn’t it? What did Paul and Silas tell the jailer to do to be saved? “Believe.” Have faith. Put your faith in Jesus Christ and be saved. Baptism is an outward sign of inward faith. There are always joys and dangers of misunderstanding with how we practice these mysteries. Believer’s baptism is the doctrine that the only way baptism is valid is if it happens after a profession of faith. The danger in that is that baptism becomes an emblem or a reward. There is a danger of spiritual pride in this. The joy in it is remembering that moment of total submission to Christ, literal, physical submersion. Infant baptism has its dangers too. God calls us to do it. I believe in it. But the danger is real. You could walk through life believing you are saved because your parents did a little ceremony over you at the church when you were in diapers. But the joy is in knowing God has acted to reach you in love and grace, you have been enfolded in the people of God, from before you even knew how to think or what to say to His love.

Does baptism save a soul? No. How are you saved? By belief. By faith in Jesus Christ. Look again at our passage. Did you forget we had one? I’m sorry. This is one of those messages when the topic takes over. Colossians 2, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:6-7). Oh, the only posture for the saved is gratitude! Thankfulness.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). No boast. No pride. Only thankfulness. “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:9-12). Baptism is like circumcision. It’s a mark of entering the community of faith, the covenant people. But it’s your whole sin-sick self that gets cut away. “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins” (Colossians 2:13).

What is salvation? What is it to be saved? Forgiveness of your sins by Jesus. In Christ. Do you believe that? Maybe you were baptized before you believed. Maybe you believed and then were baptized. Either way, by God’s grace, you get to be part of the people of the promise. To be saved, to enter into salvation, it isn’t this water you need. It’s the saving faith in Jesus Christ. It’s giving your whole self over to Him. Jennifer mentioned last week that the Greek word *baptismos* describes a ship going under in the ocean. Capsized. Sunk. In the deep. When I ask are you saved, I’m asking—have you thrown your whole life into the care and keeping of Jesus Christ who died for you? You can be saved and unbaptized. Look at the thief on the cross next to Jesus. You can be baptized and not be saved. I’ve seen it more than I care to think about. Washed in the water. Marked in the people of God; included among the community of faith. Yes. Fine. Good. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? This is the baptism that saves.