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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**September 11, 2022**

**Baptism Sunday**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just want to thank you again for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the blessings that you've bestowed over and over again upon us and we are just grateful that we still have a place to come to, a place to worship, a place that is safe for now and we're grateful for that. So this morning, Lord, again we just have a busy day ahead of us. I pray for that ongoing grace as we go to baptism afterwards and we're going to be spending this time right now just looking into exactly what baptism is. And so I pray for your spirit's presence, I pray for your insight and grace and for the ability by your Holy Spirit's power to make this of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

All right. As I said, today is our baptism picnic and once a year we have this get together for fellowship and food and it's actually an opportunity for folks to get baptized and it's still not -- not too late for that to happen. This year we're meeting at Camp Deerpark rain or shine. They've graciously opened up the camp so

we could have this baptismal ceremony. And we encourage everyone, anyone who has not taken this step to consider what God says about baptism. And so each year at this time I raise the same three questions that you need to have answered before you consider taking this step. Number one, just what is baptism; number two, what is the point of baptism; and number three, why should I get baptized?

Once again I want to reprise my baptism message of last year to answer those questions. The first question being, what is baptism? And as you probably know the word "baptize" is a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo" which simply means to immerse in liquid. If the Greeks wished to dye a piece of cloth it was -- quote -- "baptized" -- unquote -- by plunging it into a dye-filled vat. So the word baptize simply means to immerse in liquid, which raises the question what's the point of immersing a person in liquid, notably water? Well, the actual ritual of baptism consists of being plunged beneath the surface of the water and then immediately being brought back out of the water. It is a powerful symbolic act that demonstrates three different aspects of a believer's new life in Christ and in that one act there is death, there is burial, and there's resurrection all summed up.

So first let's talk about death. Covid-19 has introduced all of us to the notion of a pandemic, of a disease that takes over the

entire world. Well the very first pandemic that ever occurred was far more devastating and lasting than Covid-19 and it occurred with the very first human beings, and that was Adam and Eve. You see, mankind was originally designed to live forever and when Adam and Eve decide to rebel against God they brought about a spiritual pandemic that affected not only them but every single son and daughter of Adam since then until now. This is what God says in *Romans 5*. He says: *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. "All men sinned"* -- quote, unquote -- because Adam represented every one of us. And what God was pointing out is that Adam was the fountainhead, he was the source, the beginning of all of mankind. And when he sinned he lost his status as part of God's perfect creation. But not only did he lose it but since he was no longer perfect he passed on that imperfection to every one of us, past, present and future.

See, God by his very nature is perfection; and mankind is now by our very nature, imperfection. Adam's sin created the ultimate spiritual disease because it rendered every single person who had a connection to Adam as imperfect and every single one of us has a connection to Adam. Basically it created a whole new category of creature, one who is no longer perfect and immortal but now imperfect and mortal and subject to death. God says that: *Death*

*spread to all men because all sinned.* What he means by that is that Adam's sin fundamentally changed our nature so that every subsequent son or daughter of Adam was now born alienated from God with a nature preprogrammed to rebellion and sin. Because we had all inherited the results of Adam's rebellion, sinner is who we are by nature, sin is just what we do by desire. It's the direction that our fallen nature falls toward. And that also includes a very deep unconscious resentment of anyone claiming authority over us. As our creator, God alone can make that claim. God says he's the creator, we are the creatures. He is the king, we are his subjects. You see, God was still perfect and we no longer were but God's demand for perfection remained because that's who God is. God laid out his standards for us when he gave us the ten commandments when he handed them to Moses on Mount Sinai. And those ten laws are what renders all of us unfit for heaven because God demands that they be fulfilled perfectly. And this was not just some kind of Old Testament demand, it was a command given directly by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In *Matthew 5:48* Jesus makes this impossible demand of all of us. He says: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

You see, the ten commandments are actually a set of non-negotiable demands that the King has placed upon his subjects and violating any one of these commands in any way is a capital offense for which

all of us have earned the death penalty. And so if you've ever lied, if you've ever stolen, if you've ever lusted, coveted or disrespected your parents or taken the Lord's name in vain among other laws, if you've ever violated Jesus's command that we be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect, you are therefore disqualified from heaven. And that's why God says in *Romans 3:9*: *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* That's what people don't realize, the fact that the whole world is being held accountable to God and the penalty for every single one of us is the death penalty. Again *Romans 5:12*: *And so death spread to all men because all sinned.*

We've just come to accept death now as a natural part of living, but it was never intended to be that way. But God saw a better way. I mean God knew that mankind could no longer fulfill the law even though he was still accountable to it as God himself became one of us and then lived that life that we were all supposed to live, that life that he lived was one of total perfection. I mean Jesus didn't just talk the talk, he walked the walk. And he did so so much so that he made perhaps the most outrageous challenge a human has ever made on this planet. He literally dared his enemies, the Pharisees, he dared them to find a single sin in his

life. He said in *John 8:46*: "*Which one of you convicts me of sin?*" And you know, he could make that challenge because at the age of 32 he was figuratively and literally spotless. And having lived his life perfectly Jesus then went to the cross to offer up his life of perfection in exchange for our lives of sin. So when we accept by faith Jesus as Lord and Savior, he gives us the right to exchange our sin for his righteousness and then stand before God justified, that is with having our sin debt paid in full. And we were all of us on our way to perishing. Jesus came literally into the world of the walking dead offering life itself. *John 3:16*, we all know it: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*"

So make no mistake about it, God sent his Son into the world to rescue us from the curse that all of us were perishing from. And Jesus knew precisely that the wages of sin was death because it was our sin that led to his death. But his death made it possible that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Jesus came to perfectly fulfill what the ten commandments demanded. Having done that, he then stood in our place bearing the guilt of our sin. I mean we did the sinning and he did the dying. And death is the very first thing that baptism is all about.

See, baptism first symbolically represents death. In baptism, the plunging under the water is a living picture of what it means to die to the power of that law. I mean we're talking about dying to one way of living and being re-created to live in a new way. And when we say we're dead to sin we mean that the power that sin used to have over us has been ended by death because once a person has died, he's free from any power that the law has over him. You know, somebody like Jeffrey Epstein, he was an incredibly wicked man who may or may not have committed suicide in his jail cell. You know folks mistakenly think that his death cheated justice because for all practical purposes nothing can touch a dead man. And in one sense he is absolutely free, of his jail cell, of his creditors, and of his victims. His only problem is he's dead and his judgment still awaits.

But what if you had that very same freedom that no law could ever touch you because it saw you as a dead man but you were still very much alive? Well, that's the death that baptism represents.

*Romans 7:4 says: Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. See, in baptism you symbolize that the day you placed your faith in Christ is the day you died. You died to the law and its demands of perfection. You died to the law because*

Jesus Christ stood in your place to receive your punishment and you're now dead to its demands. You've been buried with Christ under the water and you're resurrected with him as well. And again, *Romans 6:4*: *"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* That newness of life represents life now lived free from that law. See, God's law said you must do this; you must not do that. We felt bound, we felt imprisoned by that law. Not only can we not do it but we had no desire to do it in the first place. We were what Paul calls "prisoners of the law."

You see, fallen mankind's default drive of rebellion is actually a unique form of slavery. It's a slavery that totally resents liberation. It's a slavery that fights tooth and nail to remain enslaved, it's a slavery that completely blinds those enslaved to what their status actually is. I mean they think they're free as a bird but they're not.

I have a great deal of sympathy for those who are addicted to tobacco because I was for many years. I remember somebody telling me after my tenth or so attempt at quitting that you haven't really quit until you could look at somebody smoking and not envy them. And sure enough it wasn't until I had by the grace of God been able



to quit smoking for quite a while that I could actually look at somebody smoking and not envy them for the freedom they had to smoke that I no longer had. After a long while I just lost that envy and I could see smoking for the addiction that it is and for how it enslaves by nicotine.

And you know the same could be said for pornography. According to statistics there are millions and millions of Americans who are addicted to porn but almost none of them see their addiction as addiction. Instead they see it as a freedom that they have that others, particularly Christians, don't have. And again it's only when God has given you victory over sins like that, when you die to that sin, that you can look back at the same folks who think they're free and see them as enslaved.

I've spoken many times, I've given the example many times about my non-Christian friend Tom in San Francisco and that incident that took place many, many years ago where he challenged my freedom to look at a *Penthouse* magazine sitting there on his table. Tom pointed to the magazine on his kitchen table and said, "You Christians, you don't even have the freedom to look at a *Penthouse*." And I pointed to the magazine and I said, "You don't have the freedom to not look at it." I said I can look at the cover of that magazine and just walk away and you know you can't.

And he instantly got a grin on his face because he knew that what I said was true. He knew he did not have the wherewithal to not look at that magazine. Now he hadn't realized it before but he now started to realize that he was enslaved to it. And at least he had the honesty to recognize with that grin that what he had been touting as freedom was actually a form of slavery. And because I had been freed by God from that sin I could challenge him instead asking him who's free? Who's not free? I suggested that he didn't have the freedom to walk away from that magazine while I did. And whether it's lust or envy or bitterness, jealousy, gossip or all the other sins that plague us, without Christ we are all helplessly enslaved to sin.

It was Martin Luther who said -- quote -- "Scripture represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick, and dead, but in addition to his other miseries is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able, well, and alive." My friend Tom never realized he was in fact a prisoner. But here's where the prisoner part becomes self-evident. You see, Tom knew where he was in a spiritual sense. He may have even hated where he was or not, and yet he also knew that he lacked the will to change where he was. I mean he knew deep down what the right thing was because God has embedded in the hearts of every one of us

the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. *Romans 2:15* says: *The work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.* So Tom, Tom knew the difference between right and wrong. He knew deep down that pornography was a destroyer of relationships and of purity and of marriages and that the right thing was to avoid it at all costs. He just didn't have the ability to want to do the right thing enough to do it. He was by definition a prisoner of the law. Paul said in *Romans 7:14*: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* See, as long as we live that law has the power to demand what we cannot supply. So we all wind up doing what we really do not want to do thinking we're free to do it when we're not. And it's only when we die to sin that we experience the freedom from sin.

I know all of this talk of death, burial and resurrection might sound too spiritual, too ethereal, too kind of up there in the clouds, but let me make it as practical as I can. I raise the question about dying to sin this way. I said, I lust, I envy, I lie, I gossip, I steal then I get baptized with Christ and all of that stuff just goes away? Is that the way it works? No. A lot of no's. What happens is this: I get born again first and then,

then God's Holy Spirit takes up residence inside me. *Romans 8:9: You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* So when I'm born again I become this new temple where God's Holy Spirit now lives and he now begins to change those sinful desires, they literally begin to transform. So baptism represents the dying of the old man with those old sinful desires. It means that not only can the law no longer legally touch you because you've died with Christ, it also represents the death of that old man that I used to be, that man who was held accountable to God for my sins, that man who was simply awaiting physical death to confirm the spiritual death he had already undergone. Baptism represents the death of that man.

And secondly, going under the water well of course represents burial. But here's the good news about death and burial in baptism. You see, this is a death that you choose to die and it's actually the door to life. Jesus said: *"Whoever find his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* And baptism represents your willingness to lose your old life for Christ's sake and Christ partnering with you in a new life. So when you go under the water you are representing not just one burial, but actually two. You see in baptism you don't go under that water alone. You are there symbolically participating in the

death that Jesus died. And when you go under that water you are symbolically saying when Jesus died, guess what? I died with him. This is how *Romans 6:3-4* puts it, it says: *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* So we're dead and buried with Christ as we go under that water.

Okay. Well, just what does "dead to sin" actually mean? I mean I lust, I envy, I lie, I gossip, I steal and I get baptized with Christ and it goes away? Well, the answer to that question put that way is no, baptism that way doesn't do that at all. Baptism can't confer new life. God alone can do that. What baptism does is it demonstrates that new life has already taken place. Paul tells us in *Ephesians 2* that *we were all by nature dead in our trespasses and sins.* No matter how hard we try we still lust and envy and lied and all those other things that God's law had forbidden. We all had hearts that were dead set against the will of God. And so baptism is a symbolic way of demonstrating that that person with the heart that was once dead set against the will of God, that person has died.

So first we have death to our old life; secondly we have burial,

we're buried with Christ in our sins; and thirdly we have a resurrection. Quote: *"In order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* We are raised, we are released as we come out of the water, in Christ we are now dead to sin. And as we come back from the water we visually demonstrate that truth.

Now some folks mistakenly think that the water of baptism itself are what cleanses us from sin. They don't have the power to do that. The only power to do that lies in the blood of Jesus Christ. So baptism doesn't cleanse us from sin, it is instead a sign that the cleansing has already taken place. Baptism is actually a celebration and a demonstration of a successful heart transplant that was undertaken by God himself. And that event God makes perfectly clear in Ezekiel 36. I mean, you've heard me quote this scripture countless times. What you might not realize is its connection to baptism. This is *Ezekiel 36*. God says: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

So when God is speaking about burying the old life in baptism and coming up out of the water celebrating this newness of life in Christ, he's talking about something far more profound than just cleaning our act up. In *Colossians 2:13* God says: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.* God is literally speaking about dying to one way of living and being re-created to live in a new one, of having an ice cold heart of stone surgically removed and a living, breathing heart of flesh surgically spiritually implanted. Again God says, *"I'll put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules,"* and for all of us that's a brand new way of walking. Like Christ, you now have been resurrected. You've died, you've been buried under the water representing your death with Christ. As you come out of the water you're now representing his glorious resurrection. And you also now find that your very desires are brand new, they're not the desires you've had all along. These new desires are desires that begin to line up with God's desires. And you start to do what the law used to require but you now start doing it for the sheer pleasure of doing it. You now want to do it. And so worship and giving and singing and praying, they were all things that I could do quite well without, thank you, before, before Christ came in my life but now that's unthinkable. And so now we're doing these things not because we have to but because we want to. And the

difference now is that our heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh and we freely now do what the law requires.

Jonathan Leeman sums it up nicely. He describes the freedom a heart transplant provides. This is what he says. He says:

"Biblical freedom is this a remarkable state in which we want what God wants. How does this happen? How are we set free to want what God wants? At one time God's righteous law imprisoned us, but now, we are free to be 'slaves of righteousness' and Jesus and Paul want to call that 'freedom.' How is that possible? Well, it's possible because of the new covenant. The spirit gives us new hearts. He creates new desires in us so that we desire to love God and love our neighbor which is to fulfill the law."

I mean I'm 73 years, for 49 of those years now I've been a new creature in Christ, but I still can remember my first 24 years. I can still remember when I was a prisoner of the law and I hated my life but I hated the thought of God even more. And if someone at that point could have ever stopped me and described for me what my future life would be like including what my likes and my dislikes would be, I wouldn't believe him. If someone was to tell me at age 24 that in the second half of my life I'd be going to church, I'd be studying scripture, I'd be praying for the pleasure of worshiping God, I would have burst out laughing. In fact I'm sure



I would have laughed in their face.

I mean the newness of life in Christ means a brand new set of appetites that God has placed within me. And again, we have to make a distinction here about where these appetites come from and what they really are. I mean if someone had said to me as I grow older, maybe I'd feel the need for God or for religion or church and maybe as a forty or fifty-year-old man, I might have paid attention to some of that. I might have seen some positive benefit maybe for my kids, maybe for my family, you know, in kind of doing the God thing. Perhaps I would have been willing to hear that. I might have even done the religion thing for its obvious benefits. And make no mistake about it, religion, any religion has benefits. But Romans 3 tells us that no one actually is seeking for God. They may be seeking for something religious but not for God. Say how can that be so? On any Sunday morning there are hundreds and thousands of churches and synagogues and temples and mosques, they're filled with people that are apparently seeking God. I would say in reality they're seeking the benefits of seeking God rather than seeking God himself because God says no one seeks him on their own.

And all religions offer, they offer a sense of security, a sense of belonging, a social structure, an identity structure that can make

them very attractive. I mean there's a benefit there that can have absolutely nothing to do with actually seeking God. And lots of contemporary Westerners now choose a religion like you would choose any other life-style choice, on the basis of some perceived benefit. God really has nothing to do with it. So I know had God not intervened in my life, if he had not done a spiritual heart transplant, I too would have made such a lifestyle choice. What I never would have believed is someone telling me that I would be worshiping God not for the benefit of it but for the sheer pleasure of it. I mean if someone had told me even later in life that the joy and deep satisfaction of a relationship with Jesus Christ would far surpass anything I'd ever imagined, I would have dismissed it as the rantings of a madman, but that's what newness of life in Christ is all about. I mean what happens is we start loving what Christ loved; we start hating what he hated. We start valuing what he values because the Spirit of Christ is now living inside us. Again he tells us *I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* And all of this is symbolically captured by the simple act of baptism. We are dead in our sins, buried with Christ under the water then raised with Christ as we come back out of the water.

And so to review, what is baptism? It's simply a plunging underwater. What is the point of baptism? It is a symbolic

picture of the death, burial and resurrection in Christ. It's not a cleansing from sin but rather a picture of the cleansing that's already taken place through the blood of Christ.

And finally question three, why should I get baptized? Well, the simplest answer is because God says so. He tells us to. I mean after Peter's first sermon in Acts the people were cut to the quick and Peter flat out told them they were responsible for crucifying God in the flesh. This is what Peter said in *Acts 2:36*, he said: *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* They were clearly under the conviction of the Holy Spirit so they asked Peter what do we need to do? What do you think Peter said? He said: *"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."* I mean that wasn't a suggestion, that was a command. Peter in that first sermon was doing exactly what Jesus had commanded him to do and God clearly was pleased with Peter's approach. I mean *Acts 2:41* says: *Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

In Acts 10 we have Peter speaking to a group of Gentiles who have been gloriously saved and they're in the process of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter tells these believers there's still one thing you need to do. This is Acts 10:44. It says: *While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.* Peter said that because shortly before the day, shortly before Jesus was ascended into heaven Jesus gave his final parting message to Peter and the rest of the disciples, and this is what he said. He said: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Well, it's more than 2,000 years later and we're repeating the very same process.

And that leads to an even more basic question than the one I just raised, why be baptized. The question is why are you here? Why are you here? I mean if you're a member of the kingdom of God and

God the Holy Spirit is uniquely living inside you, he is uniquely conforming you into the image of Jesus Christ. He's at work right now shaping and molding the very appetites that are inside you and that includes the appetite that causes you to want to be here in the first place. Now we said many times there's a thousand other places you could be on a Sunday morning. So why are you here? I mean is it not because God has placed within you a desire to meet with other believers, to share worship and the word of God? To become part of a chosen, called out group of fallen sinners that God has elected to pour his blood, grace and mercy into in order to display his glory? That's the living body of Christ. That's the church. And that's all part of the newness of life that's represented when we come up out of the water in baptism.

You see, the ceremony of baptism affirms the death, the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and my resurrection along with him. Again *Romans 6:4: We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* But you have to understand that newness of life is always displayed within the context of the local body of Christ, that is the church. And baptism is oftentimes the first opportunity one has to publicly affirm what God has done in our lives while at the same time affirming the church's role as an alternative reality to that world

right outside that door. Baptism also proves you can't be a lone ranger Christian because nobody baptizes themselves. I mean God designed baptism to be a physical declaration that you're lining yourself up with God's people and his body, so baptism is never a private affair. Baptism represents our entry into the kingdom of God while we're here on earth and as such it's always a public declaration. I mean even if it has to be done surreptitiously as it has to be done in lots of persecuting countries it still takes place before witnesses and it tells the world that I'm publicly declaring my allegiance to Jesus Christ and his church.

Jonathan Leeman sees baptism in athletic terms and I always conclude my message with this analogy because it's so apt. It really has to do with publicly acknowledging, as Leeman says, whose team you're on. As you know lots of times those who are coming forward for baptism are young men and women, boys and girls who may see it more plainly in terms of athletics. The important point is this, conversion and baptism, those are two very different things. And at conversion by God's grace personally and privately, as Leeman points out, we just change teams. We leave the kingdom of darkness team and we join the kingdom of light team. All things become new. *2 Corinthians* says: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* So baptism takes place after conversion. And you

know sometimes it's a matter of hours I mean the Ethiopian eunuch, for him it was a matter of hours, those 3,000 that were baptized after Peter's first sermon, sometimes it's a matter of years, but understand getting baptized always takes place after you've switched teams from the dark team to the light team. Athletically speaking baptism says now that I've switched teams, I'm about to publicly change jerseys. Baptism represents a new start with a new team that will go on forever with a new king, King Jesus who gives us life eternal and it is publicly the putting on of a new jersey. It's declaring my loyalty to this team for all time.

Mr. Leeman puts it this way when it comes to what baptism represents. He says -- quote -- "Whether people's decision to swap allegiances comes gradually or quickly, a point comes when they must decide to change their team: 'You've been playing for the red team. You've been thinking about switching to the blue team. What's it going to be, red or blue?'" Conversion occurs the moment the decision is made. You leave one team and you play for the other. Leeman goes on to say: "Baptism, then is putting on the new jersey. It's when we publicly identify ourselves, by the church's representative authority, with his death and resurrection. All the thinking and journeying come to a head right there. Through the church, Jesus asks whether we will die to ourselves and our own rule, be buried with Him, and trust that he will raise us

up with Him according to a new power and rule."

So today some of our people are going to publicly enter the water, go under the water, then rise up out of it having obeyed their Lord. By God's grace and through his mercy they have been led from the kingdom of that darkness to the kingdom of light. They've already switched teams. By God's grace through baptism we're going to have the pleasure today of watching them switch jerseys. Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the ritual that you've given to us of baptism and what it represents and I thank you for those who are willing to participate. I pray for those who desperately would love to be being baptized today but because of a sickness, because of that virus they just can't participate. I pray for an extra measure of grace for them. I just pray that you would accompany us as we go to our baptism picnic and go through the rituals of baptism itself. And I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*