

David C. Myers  
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UMW Sunday  
Baptism

## ***“Even Greater Than the Cornerstone”***

Text: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, . . .” . . . John 14: 12a

A few years ago I had a conversation with a former parishioner who felt the call of God and went to seminary and then went on to become a minister serving in the West Ohio Conference. He was telling me about the experience he had in being appointed to his first church. The District Superintendent had told him about how friendly the church was and what a great potential it would have with Jack as its pastor.

Based on his District Superintendent’s words, Jack was excited that this church would be a place where people could discover God’s guidance for their lives. Jack was certain that between his own gifts and the advertised openness of the church that it would be a place where people would minister to one another in times of comfort and distress. He was sure that that church would be a community of believers that created an atmosphere where all who walked through the doors of the church would feel welcomed and greeted.

Jack told me about an experience at the church in the early fall after he arrived. A family from the community visited his church one Sunday morning. The family must have felt good about the worship service because they decided to come back for the Wednesday evening fellowship. Jack was standing in the Fellowship Hall when this new family walked into the room carrying their casserole. They obviously hoped to get to know some of the parishioners in a relaxed environment and as they entered the room a long-time member of the church spotted them and walked over to them.

Jack was not too far away, and he had a good view of the exchange that was about to take place and he thought to himself, “Great, a member of the church is going to welcome them and show them where to place their dishes and perhaps invite them to sit with his family.” And about that time he heard the church member say to the new family: “***What are you doing here?***”

Can you imagine being greeted that way in a church where you already feel a little like a stranger. “***What are you doing here?***”

Jack was devastated, and more than a little angry. In fact during the telling of this story he used several words inappropriate to a “G” or even “PG” rated sermon. Fortunately when this incident took place, Jack realized he needed several days to calm down before calling on his church member. After a few days passed, Jack visited him and tried to determine why the church member had approached the visitor in such a fashion. “Well, I don’t know too much about their background.” And the tone of the

conversation left the clear implication that the member wasn't sure whether or not this family was "worthy" of their "friendly" congregation. Apparently this man had devised in his own mind a list of credentials one had to pass before one could become part of their church.

I know that many country clubs will want to know your credentials before they consider you for membership. College sororities and fraternities and some other civic organizations will have certain requirements to consider before you are accepted in their group. But in the church, it is supposed to be quite simple. Your status as a child of God is all you need. Your income, race, gender, occupation, social status – none of these things – determines your worthiness for acceptance in the church.

The church is to be a loving and caring community that opens its doors to all, because ultimately the church doesn't belong to us anyway. The church belongs to God. And as our lesson from First Peter emphasizes, Christ is the cornerstone of the church.

While now the cornerstone has become more of a figure of speech than an integral part of building construction, originally the cornerstone was originally used as an essential building block upon which a building was built. It was essential in holding together two walls or sides of the building. It was not only placed in one of the corners, it was often the first stone of the foundation. The remainder of the structure depended on the sturdiness of the cornerstone.

The cornerstone symbolized the foundations upon which all the rest depended. In the reading from First Peter, the writer declares that Christ is the cornerstone of the community of faith, and without Christ the family of faith would crumble. But that does not mean as followers that we are "chopped liver." Peter goes on to say that we are "living stones" meaning that we have now become God's unique incarnation in the world. And even better, as we read from John's Gospel, Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these." (John 14:12)

In other words, God works through us today! God works through each and every one of the community of faith to spread Christ-like love throughout the world. That is the community into which we are called and into which we are baptized.

However, we cannot be faithful to this task if a loving spirit is not within us. The loving spirit needs to be evident, so that when a new person visits our church, they hear: "Welcome, we're glad you're here!" and not "**What** are **you** doing **here**?"

Sad to say, often that latter attitude prevails now, as it did back in the first century. Like now, individualism prevailed; as did selfishness and a degree of smugness – even about God's love. But Jesus came to bring "Good News" to the world and Peter wrote his letters to help people understand that they did not have to succumb to the ways of the world. They tried to instill in the disciples – then and now – that there is a collective or communal character to our faith that needs to become part of our identity. God does not make covenants with individuals, God makes covenants with the communities of faith.

Peter writes, “once you were no people, but now you are God’s people.” Our belief in God, Peter says has made us “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, . . . God’s own people!”

Once God calls us suddenly we have a different perspective on the world. When we know that we are loved, we can begin to get out of our own self-centeredness. Gone is the victim mentality; gone is the “I better get mine, before it’s all gone.” God, through our community of faith reminds us that God is a God of abundance – that there is enough for all. God’s forgiving and redeeming love does not diminish when we share it – it just grows bigger.

You don’t believe it? Let’s look at what is described in the fourteenth chapter of John’s Gospel. It is the evening of the Last Supper. The disciples are fearful, self centered, and anxious, huddled together and asking only one question, “Jesus, what is going to become of us?” And Jesus responds, “Those of you who believe in Me will do even greater work than I have done!”

I doubt when Jesus spoke those words that frightened band of disciples believed Him – but that’s how Jesus works. He called rather ordinary, unqualified people to be His disciples. Then Jesus preached some powerful sermons, did some mighty acts, and then when the chips were down He told His disciples that they would do even greater things than He had done.

And they did – through their efforts the church grew and grew and grew through 20 centuries and spread all over the world!

Still don’t believe it?

Jesus raised the dead. I have seen parishioners rise up from heart-rending divorce or the dependence on addiction and start a whole new life.

Jesus gave sight to the blind. I have seen you open the eyes of some despairing person and give them hope when there was no hope to be seen.

Jesus welcomed and forgave people we wouldn’t want to be seen dead with. And I have seen you welcome people into this church and embrace them and empower them to help others make their dreams of respectability come true. Look what the UMW is doing for Courtney’s House!

Jesus turned water into wine. And I have seen you transform what could be a dull watered down Bible Study into a spirit-filled imbibing of the new wine of God’s presence that has moved you to start new missions and ministries.

Heady stuff. Amazing stuff.

Sometimes it’s so hard to believe that Jesus has chosen you – chosen you to be a royal priesthood chosen you to do works even greater than Christ did. It’s a great deal to claim for ordinary people like you and me. It would even sound conceited if we claimed it for ourselves.

But remember, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” . . . And because God choose you, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people,

in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Just remember . . . in the words of a popular poster of the 1970’s: “God does not make junk.”