

This passage we are about to read stands as one of the classic battlegrounds for debates over baptism. This Scripture is cited on whether or not people should be re-baptized if they were baptized as an infant, whether water baptism is enough or if baptism should also include the speaking in tongues.

This passage we are about to read from Acts shows that there were different understandings of baptism in the early church. This passage shows that people in the Bible had different interpretations of what baptism meant and why it was done.

### **Read Acts 19:1-7**

Author Kay Swatkowski tells about the following event from her life. “It was rush hour. Snowplows were busy clearing the streets, but not even a broom had touched the grocery store parking lot. I wrapped a blue scarf around my face, trudged through the slush, and grabbed a wet and icy cart. We just needed a few things for dinner.

Inside the store, as I rounded the end of the bread aisle and headed toward the dairy cooler, my heart began to pound so loudly I was convinced other shoppers could hear it. Panting, I hoisted a gallon of milk into the cart and then shuffled to the meat counter. Eager to get home, I even skipped the ice cream aisle.

It was bad enough putting my purchases on the checkout counter, but I realized with dismay that the most difficult part of this shopping trip still lay ahead – maneuvering the cart outside through frozen slush and snow. My imagination ran wild, and I began to wonder how long it would take a store employee to find my frozen body by the cart corral.

But I knew this feeling well – it had plagued me for nearly thirty years. Pushing a shopping cart, carrying a computer bag, breathing in cold or humid air, even at times just the process of eating could trigger a rapid heart rate that left me weak and frustrated.

Doctors, never able to observe this recurrent condition, chalked it up to anxiety. Maybe, they suggested, it was related to an arthritic condition that flared from time to time.

After a while, I gave up searching for answers or asking for help. I just learned to live with the frequent frustration of having to collapse in a chair, lean on a wall, hug a tree, or clutch a shopping cart handle when my rebellious heart decided to spring ahead of the rest of my body.

I knew I had a problem. I just didn't want to think how serious it might be.

Then one day, my heart took off on a sprint of marathon length. After twenty-four hours of unrelenting tachycardia, I was unable to walk across the room. My exhausted heart wasn't pumping enough blood to my extremities, and I learned that when the heart is in trouble, nothing else works as it should.

I survived the experience, but I learned a costly lesson: Never neglect your heart."

Today's passage asks us to examine that question as Christians. Are we really paying attention to the heart of our faith?

As Christians we can do all the right actions that we are supposed to do. We can show up for worship on a regular basis. We can read the Bible on a somewhat regular basis. We can use the right language to talk about God's activity in our life when something good happens to us.

But the Scripture today asks us to examine if our lives are being transformed by this faith in Jesus Christ? Are we different? Do we act differently than others? Or are we simply the same as people around us? Do we think and claim to be different by simply attending worship on Sunday or praying once or twice on Monday?

Baptism seems to be a really big deal to Jesus and to his early followers. There are several instances in the Bible when Baptism makes an appearance. But in this passage, it is clear that Baptism is not an ending of faith. Baptism marks the beginning of faith.

Even though we do not read about what happens next, Paul leads these 12 followers in Acts into ministry toward others. For clarity, these are not the 12 original apostles or disciples that Jesus appoints in his ministry.

These are 12 followers that Paul blesses by laying hands on them to do the work of ministry. Baptism is their calling into ministry and having hands laid on them is the affirmation.

Baptism is our calling into ministry as well. Today, we are ordaining 2 elders as well as installing a third. Their ordination into ministry as elders is their response to their baptism.

By us laying hands on them in worship we are signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit being with them at their baptism and equipping them for new ministry today. Ordination is a calling forward into Christian service.

But ordination to become a Presbyterian elder is not the only way for someone to respond to God's call through their baptism and move forward in their faith. When you are open to being transformed by God's Holy Spirit and living a life of faithful obedience then you are responding to your Baptism.

And as you respond to God's call then this impacts the lives of others who also can respond in faithfulness. Responding to the Spirit in our life is like taking good care of our physical heart.

So today we are invited to respond to the calling of God in our lives.

To live our lives faithful to God in all that we do.

To be transformed and Spirit filled. AMEN.

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-Crouch, Frank,

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