

The Road Less Traveled – January 27, 2017

A video began making the rounds on Facebook earlier this week. You may have seen it. Since it involves baptism – and many of my Facebook friends are fellow pastors – it was all over my newsfeed.

The video depicts a series of infant baptisms in what appears to be a Russian Orthodox Church. If you're not familiar with the Orthodox Church, it traces its origins back to 1054, when a schism erupted between the Western and Eastern branches of Christianity. The Church – and up until that point, there was only one Christian church – split along both geographic and theological lines. The Eastern version of the church, based in Constantinople (what is today Istanbul, Turkey), became the Orthodox Church (or the Orthodox Catholic Church). The Western version, based in Rome, became the Roman Catholic Church.

In any case, the video, which you can see [here](#), depicts a pretty radical and acrobatic infant baptism. The babies are repeatedly dipped, both head- and feet-first, in what some might argue stops just shy of shaken baby syndrome. The parents looked remarkably calm about the whole thing, though the babies emerged looking a little stunned. My Facebook friends pulled no punches in imagining how their congregations would react if they were to try this method of baptism. I am relatively certain it would not work well here in Aledo.

But here's the thing. There is something about the video that made me think. Not about doing it, of course, but about how we celebrate baptisms. For instance, I always kind of hold my breath when I sprinkle the water on a baby's head. I try to use warm water when I fill the pitcher on Sunday mornings, but it doesn't matter. The water is always cold by the time we actually get to the baptism. Each time I hold my breath because the water always seems to take the baby's breath away, and I am always worried that crying will follow. And no parent (or pastor, for that matter) wants a baby to cry during a baptism. It spoils the photos after all.

But the truth is that it is a moment that should take a baby's breath away. In fact, it should cause all of us to gasp for breath. It is a radically holy moment, a moment in which we say we believe that the voice of God literally names and claims a child as a precious son or daughter. A moment in which we as a family of faith commit to a years-long journey of love and nurturing, teaching and guiding, partnering with the child's parents in a new journey of discipleship. We commit to not only teaching and guiding and inspiring, but also to serve as the living example of what it looks like to follow Christ. And the stakes are high. Because one day in the future that child will choose for herself whether to accept Christ's invitation to follow, and how she answers will depend largely on how well the rest of us did our job.

It is one of the most important things we do as a community of faith.

I often say in worship that I hope that sacrament of baptism never becomes routine, and that's why. We may not flip babies upside down and dunk their heads into the water, but that moment we celebrate is no less radical, no less breathtaking. It is a wonderfully holy moment, and you are a crucial part of it.

Incidentally, two related things happened on Sunday, both of which I invite you to be in prayer for. The first is that we baptized Tessa McCollum at the 9:00 service. We partnered with her parents, Jeremy and Laura and her big sister and brother, Lily and Beckett, to help Tessa become a follower of Jesus. The second is that a group of seventh-graders stepped onto a journey that began way back when they were baptized. Eleven students began the process of Confirmation Sunday afternoon, a journey that will culminate the Sunday after Easter when they will claim the faith life that their parents claimed for them at their baptism. They will work hard over these next few months, and I hope you will join me in praying for them and their sacred journey.

See you Sunday.