

# The Best Moments

## *At Our Best*

22.06.19 | Jeff Lockyer

I don't know if we're in a season that's been pent up from two years of lockdowns and restrictions, or whether it's just the typical spring fever, but I've been sensing that love is in the air lately! I've been hearing of new couples who've started relationships, proposals that have been happening, and recently—for the first time since before the pandemic, I attended a wedding. And over time, as you watch these relationships, it's neat to see how this love progresses, from the declaring of your intent when you start dating, to formalizing that commitment through engagement, to publicly celebrating that commitment through a wedding. These are some of the highlight moments of our lives.

Now, here as a church community, during this month of June, we've been looking at aspects of a life of following Jesus and features of living out faith in community that represent us at our best—in an effort to once again rally around them together as we we-open, re-launch and re-start life together coming out of the pandemic. And in the same way as human love relationships bud and blossom towards these public collective celebrations we call weddings, there are similar stages to a life of faith that lead to similar public collective celebrations that represent a faith community at our best too.

A love relationship with Jesus starts off, kind of like dating, with the intent to explore. And at some point—not always recognizable as a single instant—that exploring becomes a desire to follow, where people embark on a faith relationship with Jesus. And when that happens, biblically speaking, we see that faith in Jesus—which is often private, personal and internal—shift gears into a more public and collective celebration through a ceremony called baptism. Baptism represents our best moments!

At a spiritual level, baptism does three things. First, it serves as a **form of initiation** into the way of life of following Jesus. In first-century times, baptism wasn't unique to Christianity—it was an identifier for what or who you were a part of. But, as Jesus came along, he used the act of baptism to identify Himself to God. Matthew 3:

*Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.*

Even Jesus Himself—not requiring any sin to be forgiven—engaged in the act of baptism in order to identify Himself with the God that John had been preaching about. And, since then, people following in Jesus’ footsteps are baptized to identify with Him.

The second thing baptism does is **metaphorically represent what Jesus has done** in the life of a person who’s previously made the choice to follow Him. There’s nothing magical that happens through baptism; its significance is what it symbolizes:

***Water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.***

Notice that the water of baptism serves as a symbol—it symbolizes something that’s happened spiritually, internally and invisibly. In the same way water washes you, it serves to symbolize the cleansing work of Jesus Christ, of our sin and our conscience.

And then, finally, baptism serves as a **visible declaration**. It’s a way of representing and sharing publicly what Jesus has done privately in a human heart:

***Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.***

In representing the death and resurrection of Jesus, baptism becomes the demonstration, the declaration and ultimately the celebration of the new life of Jesus in a person who’s aspired to follow Him. That’s why baptism—like a wedding ceremony in a human love relationship—serves as such a highlight moment in the life of followers of Jesus and in their community: because it moves a private intention and personal commitment into the visible and public of a collective celebration. It’s a best moment!

Notice though, that our understanding of baptism plays out among adults (or, at least, conscious young adults), not at infancy. There’s tremendous debate and unfortunately division among Christendom around the implementation of the ceremony of baptism. Everyone acknowledges that baptism is the new covenant symbol of faith in Christ. And since the old covenant symbol of belonging to God’s family—which was the Jewish practice of circumcision—

happened at physical birth, some traditions apply baptism there as well. We come from a faith tradition that understands baptism happens at birth, but is intended to represent a spiritual birth instead of physical birth, which first requires the conscious choice of someone to become a follower of Jesus.

We know that, in an environment like our community, people come from diverse backgrounds and hold different convictions on these kinds of subjects. Around here, in the spirit of what we call “Love Beyond Belief”, you can fully belong, participate and lead no matter which conviction you hold—we don’t want to be a community that requires everyone to believe the exact same things about everything. You don’t have to be baptized in the way our faith tradition understands it; we just want everyone to understand why we baptize this way and feel it’s such a significant celebratory moment.

Because after over two years of lockdowns, mask-wearing and restrictions on gathering sizes and personal contact, we want to invite people who’ve never taken this step to consider it, so each of us personally and us together as a church family can start enjoying again more and more of those moments when we’re at our best—collectively celebrating the personal explorations that led to the private commitments to follow Jesus that the public, collective celebration of baptism represents. As we move forward in this season of re-launching as a church, we want to enjoy these moments at our best!

Now I recognize, for some, it’s the very public nature of the ceremony of baptism that is the very reason they’ve never done it. Especially around here, where we try to capture people’s stories on video in order to share them across our whole community across the Niagara Region and beyond, there’s a certain terror that grips prospective baptism candidates. The only things I can say to try to combat that fear are: first, that that’s kinda the point—not that you’d be terrified through baptism, but that it would be a public and collective celebration. And in the same way the publicity doesn’t stop people from walking down the aisle or giving speeches—as nerve-racking as that can be at weddings—I’d hope that the nerves would be worth it in your faith community. Especially because, second, as the scriptures teach, “Perfect love casts out fear.” I’d hope that the love our church family has for you and our eagerness to celebrate what Jesus has done in your life could overcome your anxiety about getting baptized.

In addition, for some of us it’s been so long since we began to follow Jesus that we feel like representing that years later doesn’t have a point. If that’s you, I’d say that, following in Jesus’ footsteps, anytime is a good time to represent His activity in your life. Because anytime is a good time for us as a church family to enjoy these best moments!

Today's takeaway: if you haven't represented your faith in Jesus through baptism, take a step to at least explore the possibility of getting baptized. Talk to your Location Pastor—or if you're younger, maybe your parents or Youth Pastor—or e-mail us at [baptism@southridgechurch.ca](mailto:baptism@southridgechurch.ca). We'll walk you through a process of biblical review so you know what baptism is and can own the decision for yourself, and we'll help prepare you to share your story and walk you through the logistics of the big day. Now that Covid restrictions have been lifted and we can gather in person and more up close, let's leverage the season we're in to publicly, collectively celebrate what Jesus has done in the lives of individual people across our church family, through the kinds of highlight-reel moments that are undeniably our community at our very best!

Earlier in the service, you got the chance to experience some of the baptisms taking place at our locations last week and this morning, and as we wrap up we're going to show you one more story. If you're online, you can enjoy both the personal story and the baptism of Brennan Stodde from our Welland Location that happened last week—where he got to be baptized by his dad, Jud. And for those of us taking in this video in-person at one of our live locations this morning, you get to enjoy the story of the young woman in our church family who's getting baptized at your location. So take a moment to hear who Jesus has become in their life. And as you do, reflect on who Jesus has become in your life, and whether you've initiated yourself, represented, and publicly declared that reality through this ceremony modeled and invited by Jesus Himself. As we enjoy these three baptisms this morning—excited for more baptisms in the weeks to come—consider what's stopping you from taking the step of baptism, where you can experience, together as a community, one of the spiritually best moments of your life.