

Preach the Word

Module on Preaching the Baptized Life

In his letter to Titus, Paul repeatedly urges good works. “Show yourself in all respects to be a model of *good works*.” (Titus 2:7) “To purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for *good works*.” (Titus 2:14) “That those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to *good works*.” (Titus 3:8) “And let our people learn to devote themselves to *good works*.” (Titus 3:14)

Pastors face a myriad of preaching challenges, including rightly dividing Law and Gospel, lifting up Christ crucified, accurately presenting the text and connecting with the real lives of people. Add to the list motivating people to become devoted to good works.

But how?

How did Titus preach good works to his congregation in Crete? How do we encourage our congregations to be zealous for good works? The answer? Holy Baptism!

Paul also writes in Titus, “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:5–7)

With his focus on baptism and good works, Paul promotes *the baptized life*—with equal emphasis on God’s gifts delivered in Holy Baptism and the good works that flow from them. “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” Baptized goes with life and life goes with baptized!

Preaching the baptized life follows Paul. It also follows Martin Luther.

Perhaps the most far-reaching impact of the Reformation was its redefinition of the Christian life. Luther argued that neither ordination nor religious orders make a person spiritual. It is instead baptism. It is the baptized life. The Reformer writes, “In *baptism*, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and practice all his or her *life*.” (Large Catechism, 41). Luther frequently connects being baptized with the life of faith. It is the “present tense” of baptism. “Thus, we must regard baptism and put it to use in such a way that we may say, ‘I am baptized!’” (Large Catechism, 44)

The Reformer employs the baptismal images of regeneration, washing, cleansing, rebirth, and death and resurrection to define baptism as the monergistic work of God. The power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of baptism is that it saves. Baptism saves. Baptism also creates a new life. *The baptized life!*

Holy Baptism gives preachers Gospel power to exhort people to good works in a way that enables rather than burdens them. Luther models this in a sermon on February 2, 1534:

Here it is apparent how the devil obstructs us at every turn so that, while Baptism is not treated incorrectly, it nevertheless remains without fruit among us. Although it was without our works and good life that we found grace to obtain Baptism correctly, we are still to devote ourselves to honoring and adorning it with words and works and our whole life from now on. (Luther’s Works, 57:186–89)

In this module, several homileticians help pastors preach the baptized life more faithfully. Richard Caemmerer’s goal, malady and means keeps our Law and Gospel

straight. Thomas Long's focus and function encourages simple sermons—never simplistic, but always simple and understandable.

Bryan Chapell warns us never to remove baptism from life. When we do our sermons become “deadly Be’s.” “Be Like” sermons stress that listeners must strive to “be like” a particular biblical personality. There are also “Be Good” sermons that assume believers can secure their relationship with God by adopting right behavior. There are also “Be Disciplined” messages that urge Christians to improve their relationship with God by trying harder. All such messages are deadly because they promote good works without Gospel power. They bypass baptism!

In his 1535 Galatians lectures, Luther comments on Galatians 5:14. Here Paul writes, “The whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Luther observes,

Therefore, it is as necessary that faithful preachers urge good works as that they urge the doctrine of faith. For Satan is enraged by both and bitterly resists them. Nevertheless, faith must be implanted first; for without it one cannot understand what a good work is and what is pleasing to God. (Luther's Works, 27:53)

The Reformer describes the baptized life!

Baptized, we think godly thoughts. Baptized, we choose godly priorities. Baptized, we make godly choices with our time, our money and our lives. Through baptism, God recreates us for good works.

What a joy it is to announce, “Through baptism God has made all things new—even and especially you!”

To learn more, visit <https://www.lcms.org/about/leadership/president/preach-the-word>