

Willing to be Changed - (Open Microphone)

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

At 6:30 this morning perhaps 40 of us went down to Lake Calhoun and about 20 or 25 of us were baptized. You know that none of us think that you have to be baptized before you can have a real relationship with God. I was a Methodist and I was baptized as a baby and I have never really felt the need to be baptized again. But many of us have sensed that Jesus did want us to be baptized as a matter of obedience to him. So, that's why we have baptism services, maybe twice in the summer time and once in the winter.

Of course the baptism that we need to experience is a real one but it is not just the baptism into water. It's a different kind of baptism. You know when you go under the water, you have to suddenly begin to live independent of the life that you have already stored up within you, haven't you? Then you have to live certainly by the breath that you have taken before you go under the water and you have to live by the energy and the strength that you have stored up in the past because you are cut off from any more food while you are under the water. You have to live by whatever inner contentment and peace about yourself you have because you can't have any contact with other people; you are cut off from them and from their approval or their recognition. So, you can see that when you go under the water you're in a sense cut off from any external supply of life.

Now of course, most of us can't take that for more than three minutes and unfortunately, there the reason is not just because we don't have the lung capacity but because so many of us during our lifetime have been utterly dependent on people for our sense of identity. We've been utterly dependent on circumstances for our sense of happiness or contentment. We have been utterly dependent on things for our sense of security. So, when we are cut off from the external world like that, many of us have a real traumatic experience of frustration and we lack satisfaction in our lives if we are for a moment cut off from all those things. Loved ones, that's the kind of baptism that we do need to experience because you can only have a relationship with God if you have been baptized into a death to all other relationships that would try to supply what He alone can supply. Now that baptism you do need to experience.

You might not experience baptism with water or you may, but you do need to experience the baptism into dying to all other relationships that will try to supply you with what God alone can supply you. That's the true Baptism that is necessary. Loved ones, unless you do experience that, you will never experience spiritual regeneration. Unless you come to the point where you die and are willing to be cut off from people as the source of your identity. Unless you are willing to die and be cut off from the external world of circumstances to provide you with happiness or uplift or optimism, you can never enter into a real relationship with your Creator. It's the same with things. Unless you are willing to be cut off from the sense of security that you get from the world of things and possessions, you can never really experience a real relationship with God, because that's really what sin is, you know. Sin is depending on people for your sense of identity instead of God. Sin is depending on things for your sense of security instead of God. Sin is depending on congenial circumstances for your happiness instead of depending on God. That's what sin is, really.

Being baptized into a death to those things is being freed from sin and declaring to your Creator, "Lord, You alone can supply me with these things." That's what it means to be baptized into Jesus' death, loved ones. It means that you're willing to identify yourself with Jesus in his death to people and to the opinion and the approval of people for your own sense of significance.

It means you are willing to be baptized into that with Him. It means you are willing to be baptized into His death to food and shelter and clothing as a reassurance of security. It means you are willing to be baptized into His death to congenial or convenient circumstances as the source of your happiness. In a way, it means that just as you are cut off from the life-support system of this external physical world, when you are buried in the water -- so when you are buried with Jesus you are cut off from the life-support system of this present external world.

Of course, the killer for most of us is, we are so used to that life-support system that our whole personality reacts against that kind of death. Indeed, our personality cannot adjust to it; it cannot adapt to a different life-support system and the only reason it can at all, loved ones, is that God took your people-addicted, thing-addicted, circumstance-addicted personality and He put it into His son Jesus on Calvary and He destroyed it. He destroyed it in a cosmic destruction, and for that reason your personality is able to change like that in a moment, if you're willing. If you're willing, your personality can change like that -- in a moment. It can be looking that way for security, significance and the happiness -- and it can change like that.

Loved ones you can, you can! It is Satan and the whole trend of his servants that we have in our society today; the trends you can change, you can change. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, you can change because God has already worked the change in His Son and all you are doing by being willing for that change is to allow Him to actualize that in you this very moment. That's why it is so important to take a definite step of commitment. Doesn't matter whether it's going down into the water or not, doesn't matter whether it's coming up here to the altar or not, and doesn't matter whether it's sitting in your own chair at home -- but a definite moment of commitment when you say, "Lord God, I am willing. I am willing to die to the life-support system that has been my only reinforcement and my only strength. I am willing to die, Lord, to people and their opinion of me for my sense of identity and significance. I am willing, Lord, to die now to things and possessions for my feeling of security. I am willing to die to congenial circumstances for my sense of happiness and contentment and Lord I am willing to depend on You, and You in me, and I am willing to live off our relationship and that alone, and anything else that comes to me is just an extra that You give me, but I am willing to depend on You only." Loved ones, the moment that you part company from your last relationship of dependence on this external world, that moment God is able to cut the umbilical cord that connects you to people and things and circumstances and He is able to energize you by his Holy Spirit so that you immediately sense that He is real, and you enter into all the security and the significance and the happiness of a real personal relationship with him. So loved ones, He can only work that, if you are willing on this side to part company from those things. If you are willing to die to that life-support system, if you are willing to be cut off from that physical external world as the source of your security, significance and happiness. May I just make that point?

I am not saying that you stop eating. I am not saying that you stop having friends, not saying that you stop owning things, but you know what I am saying. You stop using those as your source of security. You stop using those as your source of significance and sense of identity. You stop using those as your source of happiness because loved ones, it's using those things that makes you so obnoxious when you don't get what you want. That's what makes you so obnoxious to the loved ones that live with you -- to your friends, to your colleagues, to everybody you come in contact with. What makes us obnoxious is we get so irritated when we don't get what people we want or what things we want or what circumstances we want. "It's raining today and I was going to go sailing. It's not snowing and I was going to go skiing." Loved ones, that's the source of sin in our lives and being

freed from that means dying to all those things as our right.

Now really the moment you are willing to give up your last relationship of dependence on whichever it is -- maybe it's your dependence on your bank account, maybe it's your dependence on your car or maybe it's your dependence on other people's opinion of you -- but the moment you are willing to die to that, the moment you are willing to be identified with Jesus in his attitude to that, that moment actually God regenerates you and makes you a child of His. The death with Jesus and the resurrection in the new relationship with God is proved by the first word or the first act that you say or do, that shows to the world and to the angels and to your friends that you are in a new relationship -- that's right.

God is only glorified when you speak the first word or do the first act that declares that a change has been brought in your life. It could be anything. It could be writing out a check to someone for sheer love of Jesus. The moment you put the pen to the paper, that is a proclamation to God that no angel can question that you have entered into a new relationship to God and that you're now looking to Him for your security and your significance and your happiness.

It could be someone criticizes you in the office and you don't whip back at them, you're silent and you're quiet and you'll love them. That is the first thought or act that signifies to God and to the whole world that you are in a different relationship. Loved ones, I think that's really what is meant in Romans 10:10 and maybe you'll look at it, because it is a different interpretation but I really think it is the meaning of the verse, "For man believes with his heart and so is justified and he confesses with his lips and so is saved." You remember that in the letter to Timothy, Paul talks about Jesus making the good confession. We so often think all confessions have to be speaking with your mouth. Well, really no. Making a good confession is being what you now are, whatever that is. It's the act or the word or the thought that proclaims to everyone that you are in a new relationship to God and that you have ceased your old relationship of dependence on people and things and circumstances. That's really what the good confession is and that's why many of the old martyrs that died are talked about as making the good confession, they made it with their lifeblood. They declared there and then, I am not dependent on this world for my safety or for my importance. There is another world that I depend on. So making the good confession, loved ones, is the act or the word or the thought that occurs in the practical everyday lives of all Christians. Acts or thoughts or words that can be observed and seen by anyone who cares to listen or to look that declare that these people are not dependent on things or people or circumstances for their happiness or security or significance but they depend on God Himself.

I think what really helps so many of us is to hear some of the rest of us share the first little steps that we took that way in our relationship with Jesus. That's what I had asked you to share very briefly this morning. If you could just keep it to a minute so that as many of us can share as possible. Would you share the first signs in your life that you saw that plainly showed you that something had happened inside you, that a mighty work had been done in your life that had changed your attitudes and changed the way you dealt with people and the way you thought about life. That will really help because some of the rest of us probably are having trouble with some of those things and it just makes all the difference to know that yes, you can actually be freed from that.

Now if you want to share other things that's good but it would really help if you would concentrate on that. Those of you who are just new in Jesus this summer and those of you who have been long run away, if God prompts you, will you try to share just those first signs in your own life that showed you that you were in a new relationship to God and a different relationship to the world because I

think a lot of us wonder, is it possible? Is it possible ever to cut that old cord? And it's good to hear that it is. I could share for the next half hour myself but I will keep quiet.

(Members of the congregation were then invited to share their testimonies.)

Speaker 1: You know it's easy to come up here and say something or sit there and explode. Today is an anniversary in my life because just about a year ago, I finally stopped running from the Lord and allowed Him to come into my life and to manifest His love to me, in my life. In all my life I had been kind of a nominal Christian and I knew about the Lord and I knew that He loved me but you know, it was just too much pain to think about His love constantly and think about Him walking with me everyday and in my life because actually I didn't really want Him to. There were just too many things in my life that I felt that I couldn't change but it turned out that I really didn't want to change them. About a year ago today it was in a midst of a time, a personal tragedy, that I finally realized that if I looked to the Lord, He could give me peace and joy even if the world around me was falling down.

And I took this inside and it was really a great experience. Then after that, He didn't leave me alone although I probably wanted to just take His gift and then use it and then forget about it. He began to point out things in my life that would make me consistent to having His love in my life every minute and every second of the day, things that were more important to me than Him and He'd show these things to me and I'd immediately jump back and say "Oh no, I can't do that, it's too important to me." Then He kept confronting me with these things and He did it very gently. After He confronted me with them I finally realized that, "Yes, Lord, if I wish to have You continue walking with me I have to deal with these things but I don't have the strength to do it myself." Then what was really neat was that He showed me strength and He gave it to me and then it became really easy and so I'd have that moment of personal victory and then I'd sit down and say "well, fine -- now everything is wonderful" -- then he'd point out something else. Even after a year, He's still doing those things for me. It has just been really amazing everything that I learn every day, all the moments of a personal victory that I have and the moments that I think of defeat but then He turns around and turns them into victory. That's what I wanted to share.

Speaker 2: This is the first day at the rest of my death. Today I was baptized at 6:30 a.m. in front of witnesses, the people who are the closest to me, my friends and my parents, my relatives -- and it was just an outward sign to see all my commitment to God -- that my life is turned around to Him and as the first outward sign to the people that I am closest to.

Speaker 3: Well, by nature I am afraid to get up and talk in front of groups but when I was baptized this morning I left that in the water. So, I am not afraid anymore. What's always been my experience is that whenever I take a little step for Jesus there is an immediate sense of peace, and then all kinds of doubts and fears. It's like Jesus gives me a big white blank wall of peace and Satan takes his crayon and puts graffiti all over it.

Right after the meeting last Sunday for baptism, Satan started putting doubts and fears and confusion into my mind and I just kept pushing them off and brushing them off, like the little pest that he is. He got really desperate and yesterday morning he started telling me that the baptism was at Lake Harriet instead of Lake Calhoun. So this morning I got up and got dressed and drove to Lake Calhoun and was baptized.

Speaker 4: I had the privilege of finding Jesus. Jesus found me in 1947. In 1952, I had marked in

my Bible after a message by dear Pastor, alongside of Galatians 2:20, "Key to Victorious Living" but never entered into that experience. On March 6th, 1973 that verse became alive. Then I started looking for a place that I could just kind of grow in Galatians 2:20. Galatians 2:20 says "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live yet not I but Christ liveth in me and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." My eyes were opened to the realization that victory in Jesus had to be promoted and worked up by Him through me. All I had to do was be willing to align my will with His will.

Then He showed me Philippians 2:13 which says, "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." I said, "Lord that's how it's done: by Philippians 2:13, 'For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.'" Then I was on the road to victory and it's been marvelous. I have been listening to Pastor, I have been sitting there on my seat, I said, "Lord, help me get in the cross, get it into those people's hearts," -- and it's just marvelous, especially after you come into it. Now I heard our Pastor mention this morning a sinless perfection. He said he did not believe in it, neither do I. I have found that as the Spirit shows me things that are not right with God, then I am responsible to Him for those things and then I come to Calvary and I bring that to the Lord and He washes it away. Then I depend on Him to have victory in whatever that was and then you know as our dear brother said here he thinks He shows me something else and that's been going on since 1973. God bless you.

Speaker 5: I was just sitting in my seat and I had to say something. I just felt God wanted me to come up here and I was scared to death because I really am afraid of talking in front of people but this week something happened to me that I just felt God really wanted me to share. I guess when Pastor talked about baptism this morning, it just really hit me because I gave my life to Christ three years ago, but I've felt in the last year that I guess things are really going kind of badly, and I was just frustrated a lot and then Pastor O'Neill talked this morning about just making a step of commitment and just dying to everything. This week I went to a little church on Wednesday night and I was in the service and the pastor said, "I really have a feeling that some of you there want to re-dedicate your life to Christ" and I just really felt it. My sister was with me, and we both had our eyes closed and all of a sudden we're up in front together and I just felt that I needed to make that step. After making that step this week He just really has blessed me in so many ways and one of the ways was I had a headache all week and I had had it for seven days. And the headache stayed and my husband prayed for me and I thought the headache was going to go away and it didn't -- but you know the headache's gone this morning, praise God! It's just the commitment that has really showed me that there is just freedom in Christ and I am just so excited to start living for Him and I now have a lot of growing to do and a lot lot of dying to do but just making that step, it's just such a blessing to me.

Speaker 6: I asked Christ into my life about four years ago and it seems like for the last three years or so I really had a dryness in my life and nothing seemed to really be going anywhere or even growing. And it wasn't until about four or five months ago that I really discovered why -- after somebody told me that prayer time each day and just study time each day would really help me even if it's five minutes or an hour -- whatever time you have to spend doing that-- and so I started doing it and I started discovering so many changes in my life just through the fact that so many prayers were answered. Then I started discovering growth and just a real peace in my heart and this relationship that was built was building everyday with God and so I just wanted to share that today. It's so important for me in my life-- this daily prayer -- and to have this relationship growing everyday just studying His Word.

Speaker 7: When Jesus Christ came into my life in 1974, I had been an artist and I had also been interested in music but to me my whole life was really involved with painting. The most important thing in the world to me was the paintings and I just loved painting. Jesus showed me the real shallowness of my life and my reputation and that it wasn't anything -- and to quote Pastor O'Neill that I was a "self-gratifying, self-glorifying miserable rat." So, I had said "yes" to Christ in my life and I found it. I had a family, two brothers in particular, younger than I, who have been sort of following in my footsteps and it turned out that they were getting interested in drugs and things and Jesus gave me something to say. He gave me something to say to them, whereas before that I couldn't ever relate to my brothers. I tried to get them interested in art but now they're both saved and we have a real brotherhood in Christ and there is hope, while before there was really nothing that we had to share.

Speaker 8: I had a couple of jobs in my life where I kept on for two or three years but they were usually jobs that were exciting or at least interesting and in February the Lord gave me a job that was really boring. So after three weeks, after the newness wore off, it was really boring. But He kept me there for seven months and during that time He showed me what you've been sharing on Sundays. I was really brought to tears. I began to see that, I began to believe Him for making Himself real in even those eight hours in an exciting way in being my joy, my excitement instead of my job. He just opened up so many things at work, different people that needed to be prayed for and He showed me what He was doing in a way that I could never see before. I just praise Him for that because He drew me closer to Himself and made me realize that He was all I needed in the way of excitement in what I was doing to and now two weeks ago God gave me a new job and I thank Him for that too.

Speaker 10: When I was a teenager I would have loved to join a church and I wasn't able really to make the connection so I decided that the best way to be a Christian was to never join, and that seemed ideal. Now the Lord has really shown me that I am to be dependable and I am to be a part of this and I do identify myself with my church and with each one of you and that really does mean being a part of the family. God really has been doing wonderful things within me.

Speaker 11: I found kind of recently that I had a different attitude towards sins, things that I do and things that I do not. I used to really kind of like my sins - such as sometimes doing something I knew was wrong -- and I felt resentful and I really wouldn't want to give that up. I did like doing them you know, but God has really shown me that sins are really nasty. I was praying one time about a month ago and I had gone fishing for the first time--and I saw some leeches. I never saw those before and it looked really nasty to me and so I was praying later and God just showed me that those sins are like leeches on me -- and I thought that they were cool and really it is so nasty, leeches coming on me. And I have a really different attitude towards my sins now and if I see one, I am just very anxious to get rid of it. Really, I just hate it -- and I didn't before.