I was just a baby when it happened, only an infant. I couldn’t walk. I couldn’t talk. I couldn’t feed myself. I couldn’t dress myself. In fact, I couldn’t do much of anything by myself. I was just a baby, and I have absolutely no memory of the event. My parents told me about it, and from what they told me, I can describe the place where it happened, and even some of the people who were there. But I have absolutely no personal memory of the event, at all. I was just a baby.

It was a long time ago! My parents – devout Christians, loyal Methodists – took me to the altar of the First Methodist Church in Throckmorton, Texas. We didn’t live in Throckmorton, but my grandfather Thompson was the pastor of that church. And “Paw Paw” took me into his arms and placed water on my head, baptizing me in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I have no memory of the event at all, but it changed my life! I was never the same after that. My whole life has been shaped by my baptism – and I don’t remember it at all!

Over the years, I have baptized more babies than I can remember or count! And each time I place the water of baptism on the head of a baby, his/her life is changed forever! Infant baptism is not a sweet little act that we do to introduce our babies to the church! It is not just a dedication of the baby to God or the church, and it isn’t just promises made by the parents. When we baptize infants, we acknowledge God’s power at work in their lives. In John Wesley’s terms, it is God’s prevenient grace at work in the life of that child. They will never be the same again, but, like me, they won’t remember the event at all! How can that be? How can an event you don’t remember change your life? Well, it’s because of what God does. Baptism, whether for a baby, a child, a youth, or an adult, symbolizes God’s power at work. It symbolizes God’s love for us. Through baptism, God enters our lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit – God’s loving acceptance happens in our lives! Baptism is something that God does and it changes our lives.

Listen to these words from the opening verses of the Gospel of Mark. It’s Mark’s account of the work of John the Baptist, and the baptism of Jesus:

John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptized by him in the Jordan River into a changed life. John wore camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey.

As he preached he said, “The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will change your life. I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism – a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit – will change you from the inside out.”

At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God’s Spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him. Along with the Spirit, a voice: “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”

Did you notice the number of times the word “change” was used in that passage? “Baptism of life-change,” “baptized into a changed life,” “his baptism will change you from the inside out” – over and over again, Mark talks about the change that is symbolized by baptism. Whether we
are babies, children, youth or adults when we are baptized, God’s power comes into our lives and changes us! Using the story of Jesus’ baptism as our pattern, we see that baptism changes us in three ways.

**First, baptism gives us our identity.** When I was born, my parents – Leonard and Wanda Thompson – welcomed me into the world, and they gave me my name. Now, if I had been a girl, I would have been named after my aunt Margaret, but I wasn’t a girl! I was a boy, and mom and dad named me Roger Kirk – why is a longer story than I can tell this morning. My name was a little bit prophetic: “Kirk” is the Scottish word for “church”, and over the years the church has had a major role in my life. I was the number two son – the middle child -- in what became a three son family. My birth into the Thompson household gave me an identity. Who I am is intertwined with that family – for better or worse -- forever. I became part of a family with roots that go back farther than I can imagine. I have relatives I don’t even know, never even heard of, all because I was born the second son of Leonard and Wanda Thompson.

But when my mother and father took me to the altar of the First Methodist Church in Throckmorton, Texas, I was given a new identity. My baptism made me part of God’s family. My baptism proclaims to me that I belong to God. Baptism tells us who we are and “whose” we are!

The story is told of a young woman who was leaving home for college. She was going to a school some distance from her home, and her mother knew that this college-bound daughter would face many temptations at school. So, mom decided to try to help her daughter out. When the daughter unpacked her suitcase at school, she found an envelope. And inside that envelope was a note from her mother. This is what it said:

> “Remember who you are!”

Sometimes we need little reminders like that – reminders of who we are and whose we are. Those reminders help us to live our lives the way we are supposed to live them.

That’s what baptism does. Baptism reminds us who we are and whose we are. It reminds us that we are part of God’s family. Max Lucado has written: “If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.” We belong to God. We are God’s pride and joy. Baptism gives us our identity as the children of God.

**Second, baptism tells the world who we are and who’s side we’re on.** I like the story of the elderly woman who attended church every Sunday. Rain or shine, winter or summer, spring or fall, you’d find her in her pew. She was like a fixture in her little congregation. The only thing was that this woman was almost blind and very hard of hearing. She had to be led into her pew by her daughter, and when she got there, the old woman couldn’t really see or hear any part of the service. But she was there every Sunday. Someone asked her once, yelling in her ear: “Mrs. Smith, why do you bother?” Do you know what she said? She said: “I’m here to show the world whose side I’m on.”

Baptism shows the world whose side we’re on. In baptism, God claims us as God’s own and announces it to the world. In Mark’s gospel, it appears that only Jesus hears the voice of God that says: “you are my Son.” But in Matthew, the announcement appears much more public. Matthew writes: “This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life.” When we are baptized, it’s like God announcing to the world: “This one’s mine!” It’s like God has a megaphone shouting to the world: “This one belongs to me!” Baptism tells the world whose side we are on, and who’s on our side!

**The third thing baptism does is give us power to be God’s people in the world.** Living in this world is a challenge, to say the least. There are temptations all around us to be people...
other than the people God wants us to be. Now, we could make a list of all the temptations of
the world that call us away from God, but no matter how long the list, and no matter if we
avoided all the temptations on our list, we’d still fall short of being the people God wants us to
be. We can’t be God’s people on our own.

Have you ever tried to pick up something really heavy? Let’s say that someone was lying
here on the floor and I wanted to move him from one spot to another. Do you think I could pick
him up and move him? Not if my life depended on it! I’m not strong enough. But what if three
or four of us tried to move him? Do you think that might work? Some things we can’t do by
ourselves. Some things are too heavy or too hard for us to do by ourselves!

That’s the way it is in our faith lives! We can’t make it by ourselves! We can’t be God’s
people by ourselves! We need help! God gives us that help at our baptism – God joins us to
help us be God’s people in the world.

In chapter two of the book of Acts, Peter preached a really good sermon that caused a bunch
of people to wake up. Listen to the story of what happened after the sermon:

Cut to the quick, those who were there listening asked Peter and the other apostles,
“Brothers! So now what do we do?”

Peter said, “Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the
name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The
promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away –
whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.”

Now folks, you and I are part of that group who are “far away!” And the promise is that when
we turn to God and are baptized, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit! God joins us in our faith
walk! God gives us God-power for the journey. God walks with us day in and day out helping
us to be God’s people in the world! How cool is that?! God doesn’t leave us to struggle alone.
Our baptism symbolizes for us that God has joined us! God is here with us, walking by our side!
God is ready to step in – when we ask – to give us strength for the journey! Our baptism
reminds us that God has joined us!

Mark tells us that baptism “will change you from the inside out.” (1) Baptism gives us our
identity. (2) Baptism tells the world who we are and who’s side we are on. (3) Baptism gives us
power to be God’s people in the world. If you have not yet been baptized, are you ready to take
on a new identity? Are you ready for God to proclaim to the world that you belong to him? Are
you ready for God to join you in your life? If you have been baptized, an important part of our
faith journey is remembering what God has done for us. Remember your baptism and be
thankful.