

## “Sealed”

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*For a series on Baptism*

Ephesians 1:1-14; Matthew 3:13-17

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Read the Scripture by clicking [here \(Ephesians\)](#) and [here \(Matthew\)](#).

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Last time, we heard Stevie Wonder. Now, some “*Signed, Sealed and Delivered,*” by Cowboy Copas.<sup>1</sup>

“Signed, sealed and delivered.” It means everything is done. It’s all looked after. Way back in old England, when someone sold land the deed had to be signed, sealed, and personally delivered.

A couple weeks ago it hit me: that is like baptism! Signed. Sealed. Delivered. Our baptism tells us that God has taken care of us. Everything needed, God has done. We can follow Jesus because we have been “signed, sealed, and delivered.”

Last Sunday, I focussed on the “signed” part. Baptism is God signing us with God’s signature. Then, we can be a sign of God for others.

Today, let’s think about the second part: “sealed.” How does baptism “seal” us?

A seal is a personal symbol that is etched into a stamp. Your “seal” is your official mark of approval. You press your seal into something like wet clay or hot wax. When that hardens, there is your mark. Permanently.

They’ve found seals that are thousands of years old. [This one is from Mesopotamia (the seal is on the left, and on the right is the impression it leaves). Here’s a seal with the name “Tutankhamun” in hieroglyphics. This seal is much more recent . . . early 13<sup>th</sup> century; it belonged to the Earl of Gloucester and Hertford. This is a seal from 1638.]<sup>2</sup>

You would sign something, but anyone could forge your signature. Your seal was an added guarantee that it was *really you*. It proved that *you* approved. Your seal marked your identity.

Your baptism is God’s seal of who you are.

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<sup>1</sup> You can listen to it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSSmSwITMA4>. Here’s more information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signed\\_Sealed\\_and\\_Delivered](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signed_Sealed_and_Delivered).

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seal\\_\(emblem\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seal_(emblem)). Images of the examples I give are in that article.

## II

Tish Harrison Warren is an Anglican priest.<sup>3</sup> She's written a book about experiencing God's presence in the ordinary of every day. Listen to what she says about waking up.

*I wake slowly. Even when the day demands I rally quickly—when my kids leap on top of me with sharp elbows or my alarm blares—I lie still for the first few seconds of the day, stunned, orienting, thoughts dulled. Then comes, slowly, the dawning of plans to make and goals for the day. But in those first delicate seconds, the bleary-eyed pause of waking, before the tasks begin, before I get on my game, I'm greeted again with the truth I am in my most basic self.*

*Whether we're children or heads of state, we sit in our pajamas for a moment, yawning, with messy hair and bad breath, unproductive, groping toward the day. Soon we'll get buttoned up into our identities: mothers, business people, students, friends, citizens. We'll spend our day conservative or liberal, rich or poor, earnest or cynical, fun-loving or serious. But as we first emerge from sleep, we are nothing but human, unimpressive, vulnerable, newly born into the day, blinking as our pupils adjust to light and our brains emerge into consciousness.*

*I always try to stay in bed longer. My body is greedy for sleep—'Just a few more minutes!'*

*But it's not just sleep I'm greedy for—it's that in-between place, liminal consciousness, where I'm cozy, not quite alert to the demands that await me. I don't want to face the warring, big and small, that lies ahead of me today. I don't want to don an identity yet. I want to stay in the womb of my covers a little longer.<sup>4</sup>*

I love the phrases she uses for those first morning moments: "My most basic self . . . nothing but human . . . the womb of my covers."

At that moment, who are you? I mean really . . . who are you? Before anyone gets the chance to tell you who they think you are . . . who are you? Before your mind turns to whatever it is you think you should be . . . who are you? Really?

## III

I read that bit from the start of Paul's Ephesian letter. It's a tricky piece to make sense of. In the Greek language Paul wrote in, it's one long, run-on sentence. Paul was so full of excitement about God, he sped from one thought to another, without even a period as a speed bump. He was overcome by what God has done. And what God continues to do.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tishharrisonwarren.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Tish Harrison Warren, *liturgy of the ordinary: sacred practices in everyday life* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 15f.

Everything that is all messed-up and scattered all-over, God is bringing back together. God is gathering all things to Himself, where they belong. God is doing all this in Jesus. Jesus chooses us to be part of God's gathering-together work. So much to celebrate!

That's the long sentence, in a nutshell. Today, though, as we think about baptism, my attention zooms in to how Paul finishes up. He ends his burst of wonder with this:

*. . . you also were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.<sup>5</sup>*

*"You also were sealed."*

Remember, a seal stamped in wax proved identity.

God seals us.

God's seal is the Holy Spirit, who proves the promise of who we are. The Spirit-seal is the proof that we belong to Jesus. He paid the price for us. He claims us. He holds us as his own.

The Spirit-seal is the proof that God is doing God's gathering-together work in us. Everything about us — including everything scattered, confused and falling apart — God is bringing together and making us whole. God seals it!

Everything around us — our families, our neighbourhoods, our communities, our world — God is bringing together and making it whole. God seals it!

Your relationship with God —that relationship of love God made you for — God is making it whole. God seals it!

Your baptism celebrates this. You are sealed!

#### IV

You heard the second reading. When Jesus the Son was baptised, God his Father sealed him with the promised Holy Spirit. This showed what has been true forever and before: the whole Trinity who is God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit — is joined in a relationship of perfect and unbounded love.

The Holy Spirit joins us with Jesus. God brings us into that love who is God.

That's your identity. You are God's beloved. This is for everyone! We are all invited to

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<sup>5</sup> My translation of Ephesians 1:13b.

enter into that embrace God is already giving us.

God is giving it! God's love is not something we have to earn. Great news: we do not have to!

Look at Jesus. When was he baptised? Was it after he fed a crowd of hungry people? Was it after he walked on water or stilled a storm? Was it after he healed someone sick or freed someone imprisoned? Was it after he gave forgiveness and acceptance to someone who everyone had given up on? Was it after he was tortured and executed on a cross? Was it after he arose from the dead? No. He did all these things, but he was baptised before them. He was already God's beloved, sharing in God's delight.

We baptise babies. What have they done? They are already God's beloved, sharing in God's delight.

We baptise people at any age, so what about someone who is 14? Or 40? Or 84? What have they accomplished to *deserve* baptism? Nothing. What have they done to *earn* their true identity? Nothing. They were already God's beloved, sharing in God's delight.

What about you when you get up in the morning? When you are in that sleepy state before you have put on anything for the day? Who are you?

You are already God's beloved, sharing in God's delight. All because of Jesus.

A seal is a mark of identity. In baptism, God seals you with who you already are.

Thanks be to God!