

Today we begin a sermon series that gets to the heart of what congregational renewal is.

The series is called PAWN – an acronym for Purpose, Assets, Wows!, and Needs.

1. The first step is recognizing and committing to our God-given purpose.
2. Then considering what God has given us to carry out that purpose, our assets;
3. Seeing how God is actively working through us to make his kingdom known, the Wows!
4. And finally, asking for what we need to get the job done.

Purpose, Assets, wows! And Needs.

This Sunday and next Sunday, we will be focusing on the P – our purpose as Christians and as a congregation of Christians.

Today is a great day to begin because Baptism is where it all starts for us – and where an important phase of his life started for Jesus.

But first a word about pickles. Yes, pickles.

This word should not be confused with $\overline{\text{baptō}}$ (911). The clearest example that shows the meaning of baptizo is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be 'dipped' ($\overline{\text{baptō}}$) into boiling water and then 'baptized' ($\overline{\text{baptizō}}$) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptizing the vegetable, produces a permanent change.

About 200 years before Jesus was born, a doctor in Greece named Nicander wrote down a recipe for making pickles.

He said that the vegetable should first be dipped into boiling water and then baptized in a vinegar solution.

The word for “dipped” is βαπτο, indicating a brief, temporary immersion.

The word baptize, on the other hand, indicates a soaking immersion that produces a permanent change.

Baptism produces a permanent change.

As John the Baptizer said in our Gospel – he baptized with water

– producing the enduring change of cleansing and purification from sins.

But Jesus comes to baptize with the Holy Spirit

– **that is, to immerse people in the very life force of God.**

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that only those who are “born again of water and the Spirit” may enter the kingdom of heaven.

And in Mark 16, Jesus says “Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.”

The beginning of Jesus’ public ministry as the Savior of God’s people

is the occasion of his **baptism by John** in the River Jordan

and his **baptism in the Holy Spirit** by God the Father.

Jesus publicly entered into ministry **without sin** and **filled with the life of God** – baptized “of water and the Holy Spirit.”

But just so there is no misunderstanding, **people are not the same as pickles.**

If people were like pickles, being baptized would entail being held underwater until we drowned.

So, the term baptize does not dictate a particular methodology.

When we are talking about what God is doing in baptism, it is not important whether there is a large pool of water, or just a few drops sprinkled.

**What is important is the immersion in faith
that receives both the cleansing from the dirt of sin
and the permanent change of heart and life by the Holy Spirit.**

Baptism produces a permanent change – we are not the same.

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In Bible times, the name given to a person indicated the character, nature and purpose of that person.

For example, Rachel bore a son, for which she praised God and named her son “Praised”, Judah.

Judah became a whole tribe of people, and one of them was named Caleb. Caleb’s story is found in the book of Numbers chapters 13-15.

Caleb was a friend of Joshua and was a reconnaissance scout for God’s people seeking to enter the land promised by God.

So the name Caleb means faithful and bold, like a good hunting dog.

Dominic is not a name found in the Bible, but its root, Domini, is very common in the Bible.

“Domini” is the Latin word for “Belonging to the Lord”.

So, Dominic means “belonging to Jesus”.

Pretty cool names for two boys about to be baptized in water and the Holy Spirit!

Jesus’ name reflected his purpose, too, because “Jesus” means “Savior”

–**he will save God’s people from their sins**, so that what we do wrong will not separate us from God forever.

That saving ministry begins with Jesus’ Baptism in water and the Holy Spirit

and continues with the baptism of Caleb & Dominic by water and the Spirit.

So, baptism is foremost to our purpose as Christians.

To be baptized is to be changed by God to live a new life.

Our purpose as individual Christians is **to live God’s life**

as we discover it in the Bible

and in the community of believers we call the church.

The purpose of the church, then, is not something we have to sit around a table and figure out for ourselves

– **it is given directly by Jesus himself**

– *Go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.*

Remember – **baptism produces permanent change.**

Baptism changes us

**from slaves to sin, death, and the devil
to being sons and daughters of God,
disciples or followers of Jesus.**

Baptism gives us – as it gave Jesus

– the name, nature, and life
of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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Baptizing and teaching Jesus' ways is our whole purpose as the church.

Everything we do as the church is to **lead people to Jesus** so that they, too, can be baptized, immersed in the life of the triune God.

And then we **teach them how to live this new life** in God's Holy Spirit.

Today, God is claiming Dominic and Caleb for his kingdom.

Today, like Jesus, they will be baptized by water and the Holy Spirit, and share the life and purpose of God.

Today, Crystal is affirming God's claim on her as a baptized child of God.

St. Peter's ministry to their family,

our welcome and care,

our witness to the grace and mercy of Jesus has led them to this point.

Today, Before our eyes, we are seeing miracles –

God transforming sinners into saints,

the dying into those alive in his love,

minions of the devil into servants of the living God.

For Baptism produces permanent change in our lives and in the lives of those we touch.

Change that propels us to live with purpose.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen