

On a wintry morning in 1993 I was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. As my priest held me on his hip in one arm, he reached into the baptismal font with the other. Cupping his hand, he brought small scoops of water to my forehead. "Rebecca Maria, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." One splash for each person of the holy Trinity. "Rebecca Maria," he then said, "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever." The congregation applauded as my priest smiled into my eyes. He then handed me back to my beaming parents.

In Romans chapter six Paul the Apostle speaks to those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus. *Baptized into Christ Jesus* – it's kind of a funny phrase. What does Paul mean "baptized into Christ Jesus"? Let's start with the word "baptized."

The word Paul uses for "baptized," *baptizo*, means to submerge for a long period of time. The same word in Greek can be used to describe sunken ships. The word *bapto*, which *baptizo* came from, means to dip, as in to dip the bread into the wine. It's a simpler, older word denoting a simpler, shorter action. Allow me to illustrate the difference with a pickling recipe from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived around 200 BC. He instructs the cook to first to dip, (these are my tongs, I'm dipping the cucumber) *bapto*, the cucumber into boiling water. I'm not changing any of its chemical properties and not leaving in the water. I'm dipping it briefly in hot water. Second, Nicander instructs the cook to baptize, *baptizo*, the cucumber in a vinegar solution, completing submerging it and leaving there--also forever changing its pH level and other properties. Now maybe you think this is a sermon about *Veggie Tales*, but hang in with me there. The first step of dipping is temporary, and it doesn't change the cucumber; the second, however, the baptizing of the cucumber, is permanent, and it does change the cucumber. If you've ever pickled any vegetables, which I imagine many of you have, you'll know that once pickled, the vegetable has been changed and is never the same. It tastes different! You cannot un-pickle a vegetable.

I am an etymology nerd, and I love metaphors. I especially appreciate this distinction between *bapto* and *baptizo* because it suggests to me that my baptism is not a one-time event that fades or has no lasting effect. And nothing I do can reverse it. I am marked as Christ's own forever. Indeed, for Paul, baptism is a life-long journey. Once we have been baptized, we have died to our old ways, and even though sin may persist in this world and in ourselves, sin does not overtake us. As the Gospel according to John reads, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Christ has died, and Christ has risen, and Christ has won over the powers of sin and death. And we are united with Christ in that. We can trust that his resurrection, that his defeat of sin and death, extends to us in our lives because we are in Him and He is in us.

When I was growing up I attended a summer camp where I was instructed to pray a simple prayer confessing my sins and inviting Jesus into my heart as my Lord and Savior. This act, I was told, was necessary if I wanted to be Christ's own forever, or as my camp counselors put it, to be "saved." Saved from, to put it lightly, a rather unappealing eternity of torment. Let's just say I was a bit frightened. And in my cabin bunkbed after lights out, I prayed for Jesus to come into my heart. No flash of lightning appeared, which I thought should probably happen for me if it had happened for the apostle Paul. I was convinced that I had done something wrong, or maybe I just wasn't worthy of being saved, or God didn't hear me.

As an adult I have embraced the Benedictine concept of *conversion of life*, which is a slower and more ongoing process. It is the process of slowly changing one's actions and attitudes to lead a more Christ-like life of love, service, and devotion. A spiritual mentor of mine used the metaphor of a crockpot to describe conversion of life. You put in all your ingredients, your carrots, your broth, your celery, your beans – and you turn on your crockpot. It's a slow conversion.

In that process, the conversion of life, I feel like God accepts me where I am. And wherever I am is okay and is enough for now. It doesn't mean I'll be there forever, and it doesn't mean I won't get to where I am headed. And I can trust that God's inspiration and power will continually work in me, even when I can't feel it. We can get discouraged but, as the spiritual "There is a Balm in Gilead" suggests, the holy spirit will revive our souls again. Or, as I like to repeat to myself, "Glory to God in the highest, whose power working in me can do infinitely more than I can ask or imagine."

I love to run in nature. One time I was running on a wooded road while listening to a guided meditation run, focusing on my breath and my strides. Then the narrator of my running meditation said, "it's okay to go at your own pace." And it caught me off guard because I have listened to that guided run countless times and that sentence never hit me that way. I just always thought okay, be smart about your running pace. I am being smart about my running pace. But that night as I ran under the green tree cover, I felt God's embrace through the words, telling me, "Maria, it's okay to go at your own pace."

Sometimes I get discouraged because I feel like I haven't hit certain milestones or life goals that I think I ought to have hit by now. I start to feel uniquely inadequate as a human being in this regard, like everyone else must be on pace! Until I hear Mary Oliver's poem

Things take the time they take. Don't worry.

How many roads did St. Augustine follow before he became St. Augustine?

Things take the time they take. I know I am not alone in this. What are you feeling rushed to complete? What do you feel needs to change now? Impatience can be a great thing – impatience for acts of violence and discrimination, for example, or impatience to get back to work or to find new work. Yes, impatience can point to something really quite beautiful: commitment. Conviction. Devotion. But just remember that God is with you on the journey and

life isn't a sprint; it's a marathon. Justice doesn't happen overnight. Healing doesn't happen overnight. Becoming a saint doesn't happen overnight.

The baptismal water may have dried from my forehead long ago, absorbed into my glistening skin, but I have been marked as Christ's own forever. And nothing and no one can change that. And the newness of life that I walk in as a result of that – it's an ongoing process, not without its fits and starts. But my identity and my belonging in Christ – that never changes.

So we have been buried with Christ in his death. We are waiting at home, fearful of the virus. We are waiting at home, anxious for justice. We are with you in that tomb, Jesus; we know the darkness and the separation from love. For what can we hope?

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

My brothers and sisters, Christ died and knows your pain and your suffering and your separation from fullness of life. He is united to you in that. But let's not forget, Christ has defeated death and defeated all that separates us from love, hope, and victory. We will rise with Christ. And I don't know about you, but I see Christ's resurrection in the world already. Though it's slow progress, far slower than any of us I am sure would like, there is progress. Scientists now understand how the virus spreads, so that business and governments can re-open with appropriate precautions in place. I see resurrection in the growing, widespread commitment to honor the dignity and life of every human being. I see resurrection in my own life, in my increasing acceptance of God's love for me, and my own love for me, where I am on my life's journey, whatever my pace. I see resurrection in the ways we humans persist in connecting even across the distance, adapting in uncertain times to love and care for one another. I see the crockpot cooking; I see the conversion of life coming. Christ is at work in the world, my friends, and Christ is at work in you. We have only to join in what God is already up to.

A favorite poet of mine, Mary Szybist says, "I think I see annunciations everywhere." Annunciations – moments when the divine breaks into the human realm, announcing God's favor and good plan. "I think I see annunciations everywhere." I think I see resurrection everywhere. Do you?