The Dawn of a New Age, Part 2

LESSON 4: RE-BAPTIZED

Objective
To familiarize students with the convictions and costs of receiving baptism as adults in the early Anabaptist community. Acts 5:29—*But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.”*

Key Concepts
• Students will learn how and why the first Anabaptist was baptized.
• Students will explore the results of the first baptism in the lives of Felix Mantz, Conrad Grebel, and Georg Blaurock.
• Students will feel the sense of persecution experienced by the early Anabaptists.
• Students will compare and contrast contemporary experiences of pursuit with that experienced by Anabaptists in the 16th century.
• Students will consider how understandings about baptism have changed over time.

Estimated Lesson Time: 50 minutes

Materials
• Copies of “The First Re-baptism” handout (p. 98) for student actors
• Copies of “The Joy and the Cost: Felix Mantz,” “The Joy and the Cost: Conrad Grebel,” and “The Joy and the Cost: Georg Blaurock” (pp. 99-101) for student small groups
• Student Bibles, if using memory work.
• (Optional) Pitcher of water, for “Pitcher talk” Extend the Lesson activity
• (Optional) Copies of “Comparing Persecutions” handout (p. 102), for that Extend the Lesson activity

Teacher Preparation
1. Make three copies of the “The First Re-baptism” handout.
2. Contact three students in advance of this lesson and assign them one of the three characters in The First Re-baptism. Instruct them not to tell anyone else of their assignment. If possible, arrange for the three to practice the skit together the day before the lesson.
4. Calculate the number of days between January 21, 1525, and the present date. From January 21, 1525, until January 1, 2004, exactly 174,921 days had passed. Simply add to this total the number of days since January 1, 2004 (OR go to www.timeanddate.com/date/duration.html).
5. If using the Extend the Lesson activity entitled “Pitcher talk,” bring a pitcher to class and fill it with water.

6. If using the “Cave worship service and disruption” Extend the Lesson activity, create a dark worship place in class or another location. Ask an administrator or other authority to interrupt your worship. If using a remote location, arrange for parental permission for students.

7. If using the Extend the Lesson activity, “Comparing persecutions,” make enough handouts for one for each student.

**INTRODUCING THE LESSON**

**Acting out a baptism.** Say to the students, “You don’t know it, but there are three important historical people sitting right here in our class. I didn’t know it, either, until Folks sent me this message. Here’s what I found in my mailbox this morning.” Read the following letter:

Dear Ms./Mr. __________ (fill in your last name),
I have discovered that three members of your class are actually hiding their true identities. The person who is wearing a ________ (fill in an article of clothing worn by “Felix Mantz”) is actually Felix Mantz. The person who is wearing ________ (fill in something “Conrad Grebel” is wearing) is actually Conrad Grebel. The person who is wearing ________ (fill in something “Georg Blaurock” is wearing) is actually Georg Blaurock. Call them to the front of the classroom and watch what happens!
Sincerely,
Folks

Invite the three student actors forward to act out “The First Re-Baptism” (p. 98), as previously arranged. Take the part of the Narrator yourself. After the skit, the students may return to their seats.

**LESSON STEPS**

1. **The Joy and the Cost.** Divide the class into three groups, according to their birthdays. Group 1: January-April; Group 2: May-August; Group 3: September-December. Adjust, if necessary, to ensure relatively equal group sizes. Distribute The Joy and the Cost handouts. Each group should get a different character—Group 1: Felix Mantz; Group 2: Conrad Grebel; and Group 3: Georg Blaurock.

   Assign each group to read their copy by themselves and come up with a simple mime to demonstrate how their character died. Each group will perform their pantomime for the other groups to guess. When the correct guess is made, a student from the performing group will read the full text of their copy of The Joy and the Cost. Repeat until each group has performed and read their character’s life story.

2. **Why the risk?** Assign each student to write a paragraph about why they think Grebel, Blaurock, and Mantz risked their lives to become Anabaptists. The term “Anabaptists” means those who are re-baptized (not, as is sometimes thought, that they are against or anti-baptism). These three men did not give in or go back
on their decision. Invite the students to write about what might have been going on in the men’s minds. Encourage them to make a comparison with something in their lives about which they believe strongly enough to risk their lives. Have students read and check each other’s work for grammar errors.

3. **Activity selection.** Say, “Those who come closest to figuring out how many days have passed between the date of the first Anabaptist adult baptism and today get to select the closing activity.” Allow the students three minutes to calculate answers on their own and write them down on a piece of paper identified with their name.

When everyone is finished, say, “Timeline tells me that the correct answer is ______.” Allow the winning students (or those with the closest answers) to vote for spending the last ten minutes of class reading the paragraphs they have just written or discussing a series of questions about baptism.

4. **Questions or paragraphs.** If reading paragraphs, invite each student to read his or her paragraph, either in order of seating or by volunteering. Give encouragement and positive feedback.

If discussing questions, use the following questions:

- How has baptism changed since George, Conrad and Felix baptized each other?
- Does it matter at what age a person is baptized?
- What do you think is the most important part of the opening skit? Why was this important in the Anabaptist movement?
- Where did these Anabaptists get their ideas about the need to baptize adults? Why wasn’t baptizing a baby good enough in their minds?
- What does baptism mean in your church? How would you explain it to someone who has never attended your congregation?

5. **Marking the date.** As a closing exercise, have one student draw a picture of a pitcher of water or basin, or cut out a picture of a baptism scene (OR simply write “First Anabaptist baptism”) and place it on the timeline at January 21, 1525.

**EXTEND THE LESSON**
(*These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 50 minutes.*)

- **Pitcher talk.** Bring in a pitcher of water and talk about what students understand about baptism. Allow them to articulate ideas about the purpose of baptism, such as to demonstrate belief. Remind them of:

  —Jesus’ baptism by John
  —what is usually said in baptism in their tradition (often a comment about faith in Jesus Christ, a renunciation of the evil in the world, and a willingness to give and receive counsel in the church community, as well as a variety of doctrinal assertions);
  —the usual age of 16th- and 17th-century Anabaptist baptisms (people in their twenties or older);
  —the root of the term Anabaptism (people who were re-baptized)

Ask students to reflect on the customs of baptism in their own church. Consider giving an assignment to research baptism ideas in their church tradition and how those ideas differ from or are similar to the first scene acted out in class today.
• **Memory work.** Assign students to memorize Acts 5:29 by the end of the week. They should be able to report to the class how the passage relates to the baptism story acted out in class.

• **Cave worship service and disruption.** Darken all the windows in the classroom or in a separate room elsewhere in the school building (a furnace room or large closet might also work), and hold a cave service. Sing songs from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, read a short passage of scripture (Acts 5:29 or Matthew 28:20: *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*) You may want to have students sneak silently, one-by-one, to a different room to hold the service (with approval from administrators).

  OR, make a cave out of blankets and desks, or section off a corner of the room in which to hold the service. Invite students inside and hold a worship service as described above.

  Ask the principal or another authority figure ahead of time to enter the space and disrupt the worship. You might want to take a student or two to the office or to an assistant teacher for violation of rules. Then bring them back into class and debrief on the Anabaptists’ experience of pursuit and capture.

• **Comparing persecutions.** Ask the students to compare and contrast the persecutions at the time of Grebel, Mantz, and Blaurock and today. Hand out the “Comparing Persecutions” matching exercise. When students have matched the categories, identify the “correct answers” below:

  **Comparing Persecutions Answer Key:**
  1. Assumed innocent: F. middle-class and white people in the U.S.; H. Zwingli and members of the Zürich city council.
  3. Interrupted in the midst of their worship services: C. Anabaptists worshipping in caves.
  5. Illegal to practice faith: E. Anabaptists in 16th century; B. Some Christians in countries like China.
  6. Appeal to scriptures for authority before God: I. Anabaptists who baptized each other; J. Conscientious objectors who refuse to participate in or pay for the military today.

  Ask, “Do you agree or disagree with these answers? Why?” Discuss contemporary laws that have been used or might be used in inappropriate ways such as the Patriot Act, under which basic assumptions of innocence have been removed. Note similarities to laws passed by the Zürich city council, in which there was no assumption of innocence for Anabaptists and immediate and harsh sentencing.

  As time permits, discuss parallels between 16th century Anabaptists and people of color who are picked up by the police without cause, the experience of Colombian Christians who are often targets of violence, and Christians in China who often cannot freely practice their religion. Discuss how the students’ faith calls them to respond to situations like these.
The First Re-baptism

NARRATOR: Date: January 21, 1525. Characters: Felix Mantz, a young upstart who believed in taking Ulrich Zwingli’s teachings beyond the limits set by the Zürich city council; Conrad Grebel, son of a wealthy family, also seeking a more radical reformation; and Georg Blaurock, a former priest filled with zeal for his newfound belief in a deeper meaning of the Bible. Although the events are real, this dialogue is a fictional account of how the events might have happened. The scene opens in the home of Felix Mantz’s mother.

MANTZ: Welcome to my home—well, actually, my mother’s home, but it’s where I’ve lived forever . . .

BLAUNROCK: Yeah, we get the point, Felix. Was anyone followed?

GREBEL: No, I don’t think they sent anyone after us tonight.

MANTZ: Let’s go into the other room.

GREBEL: I want to read Acts 5:29 again. I need the encouragement tonight.


MANTZ: Does that mean all the time, every day?

BLAUNROCK: Of course, yes. If I wanted to get baptized right now. . .

GREBEL: Let’s not be rash, George. Slow down.

BLAUNROCK: I’m just saying that if I wanted to get baptized and it was clear to me, to all of us, that this is what God wanted me to do, it’s what I’d have to do. Right?

MANTZ: The scriptures are clear that we obey God first.

GREBEL: All the time.

MANTZ: They didn’t try to soften it. The Bible says, “God rather than men.”

BLAUNROCK: So if I said we should, then we would? That’s what you’re saying, right?

GREBEL/MANTZ (in unison): Right.

(Pause—serious expressions on the men’s faces)

BLAUNROCK: Conrad Grebel, will you baptize me right here, right now?

GREBEL: Yes, I believe I will.

BLAUNROCK: Then please do so. I commit myself to a life of service to Christ, a life of ministry, in order to build up God’s kingdom here on this earth, and to be faithful in my Christian walk.

GREBEL: And so I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

(He mimes baptizing and then, silently, the others baptize each other in turn.)
The Joy and the Cost: Felix Mantz

Felix Mantz was born about 1498 in the town of Zürich, in Switzerland. Although his parents were not married when he was born, he still managed to receive a good education and knew Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. When Ulrich Zwingli moved to Zürich in 1519, Mantz was only 21 years old, but he began to follow Zwingli's teachings. Two years later, Conrad Grebel joined as well. By 1523, they became convinced that Zwingli had compromised too much with the Zürich city council—especially on the belief that only adults should receive baptism. At one point, they even debated Zwingli in public, but the city council members declared Zwingli the winner.

Following their historic baptism at the home of Mantz's mother, these men cut their ties with Zwingli and the city council. Mantz became a leader in the new movement that resulted from their decision. He translated scriptures into languages that people could understand and gave his energy to evangelizing others. While still in his twenties, he was arrested several times for his beliefs.

Finally, while Mantz was preaching with Georg Blaurock one day, the authorities arrested the two men and imprisoned them in Zürich, at the Wellenburg prison. While Felix Mantz was engaged in his preaching ministry, the Zürich city council had passed a law stating that anyone who had received adult baptism was to be executed by drowning. Less than two years after he had been baptized, at the age of 29, Felix Mantz was put to death by drowning. It was the first execution of an Anabaptist by Protestants.

On his way to be drowned, Mantz’s mother and brother encouraged him, telling him not to give in. A minister came along to try to persuade Mantz to go back on his beliefs, but he refused to give in. His executioners tied his hands together, pulled them behind his knees and placed a pole between them. Then they threw him into the freezing cold waters, where he drowned. Mantz's last words are believed to have been, “Into thy hands, O God, I commend my spirit.”

Sources: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix_Mantz; http://cat.xula.edu/tpr/people/Mantz/
The Joy and the Cost: Conrad Grebel

Conrad Grebel could have lived a different life from the one he chose. He was born into a wealthy family in Zürich, Switzerland, in 1498. In addition to money, he also had connections. His father served on the Zürich city council, and he learned to know important people while he studied at the University of Basel and the University of Vienna. He didn't take his studies as seriously, though. Following six years in college, he came home without any money and without a college degree.

Grebel decided to put his life on a different track when he returned home. Like Felix Mantz, he joined a study group led by Ulrich Zwingli, where he became close friends with Mantz in 1521. He and Mantz became frustrated with the compromises that Zwingli was making with the city council in Zürich and began to speak out against him.

Following the historic moment when Grebel baptized Georg Blaurock, Grebel took on a leadership role in the new movement that began to form around their courageous action. Having broken with Zwingli, they began to preach and encourage others to take the reforms begun by Zwingli to a new level. Within a matter of months, Grebel had helped bring about the baptism of as many 500 people in the neighboring town of St. Gall. For this and other actions, he was arrested and given a sentence of life in prison in October of 1525.

Although friends helped him break out of prison in March of 1526, Grebel was weak and sickly following his long imprisonment. Later that year, at the age of 28, Grebel died of the plague.

Source: http://cat.xula.edu/tpr/people/grebel/
The Joy and the Cost: Georg Blaurock

Georg Blaurock was born in 1491, which made him about seven years older than Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz. Blaurock was a monk who left the Catholic church when he became convinced of the truth that Ulrich Zwingli began preaching in Zürich in 1521. Following his baptism in 1525 at the hands of Conrad Grebel, he brought his exuberance and joy to a ministry of preaching.

People loved to hear Blaurock preach. One time, he even stopped one of Zwingli’s assistants on his way to the pulpit and said, “Not you, but I am sent to preach.” For this bold move, Blaurock was arrested by authorities and imprisoned, something that happened to him eight times. Along with his good friend, Felix Mantz, he traveled into the high country around the city of Zürich, where he preached and sang songs to the many who came to listen to him. Even when he was arrested, Blaurock remained cheerful and sang songs to those around him.

A year after their adult baptisms, Mantz, Grebel, and Blaurock were all sentenced to life in prison. After they escaped, Blaurock and Mantz continued to preach until they were arrested again. Blaurock was beaten with rods until bloody, on the same day that his friend Mantz was drowned. Blaurock refused to turn back on his faith and continued to preach. He preached in caves, the woods, even in ravines, and often at night. During his last days, when he was imprisoned and tortured, Blaurock wrote hymns of praise. On September 6, 1529, Blaurock was burned at the stake.


An artist’s idea of Georg Blaurock

Remember Zwingli? We met him in our last lesson. He was the church leader who went beyond Martin Luther’s reformations.

Georg’s real last name was Cajakob, but he wore a blue coat so often people started calling him that instead. In Georg’s native language, “blau” means blue and “rock” means coat. So you could call him Georg Bluecoat.
Comparing Persecutions

Match the numbered items on the left with the lettered items on the right. (Some of the numbers will match more than one letter.)

1. Assumed innocent
2. Assumed guilty by criminal justice practitioners
3. Interrupted in the midst of their worship services
4. Suspected by fellow countrymen
5. Illegal to practice faith
6. Appeal to scriptures for authority before God

A. Poor and people of color in the U.S.
B. Some Christians in countries like China
C. Anabaptists worshipping in caves
D. Moslems in U.S. in 21st century
E. Anabaptists in 16th century
F. Middle-class and white people in U.S.
G. Anabaptists sought by persecuting authorities
H. Zwingli and members of Zürich city council
I. Anabaptists who baptized each other
J. Conscientious objectors who refuse to participate in or pay for the military today
K. Anabaptists in Switzerland in 16th century