

On the Banks of the Tennessee River

The Old Fashion River Baptizing & Coming New Age

By Sister Sharon Roach



In August of 2006 my children were baptized at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Lima, Ohio. As I watched them walk down the aisle in their baptismal gowns my eyes swelled with tears and my heart with joy. This was a very special time because this was also the summer that our house burned down in Washington DC. I sent my children to stay with my sister while I searched for a new home and tried to rebuild some semblance of home life for them before they had to return to school in September. It was during their stay as they attended this wonderful church that they decided to accept Christ in their life. The deacons opened trap-like doors in the sanctuary floor revealing a pool of sparkling water in a large tub. I

shouted with joy as each of my children descended into the pool and rose up with a splash. My mind wandered back to a time when sanctuary pools was unheard of and visions of baptisms on the bank of the Tennessee River became crystal clear before me. For as long as I live, I will never forget those bright sunny days on the banks of the river.

Every year our little rural church would gather at the banks of the river following our revival. Old men and women would make their way through the beaten paths in their Sunday best. Mothers whose spirits were as solid as rock with the wisdom of the ages wrote on their faces would sway to and fro fanning themselves in the summer heat.

Fathers like strong pillars stood holding up the small gathering with their presence of strength. Songs handed down through generations would be sung, sacred, spiritual songs that carried Holy Ghost power originating from the lips of the slaves and from souls of steel. As the old songs were sung and the humming and mourning of spiritual souls was made the air became electrifying. This was no show; this was pure unadulterated praise from people who had seen their share of hardship, whose only release from the troubles of the world was in prayer and song to God. Hands that washed and cooked for a living for 30+ years now were raised before God and voices which could not be heard in their work places now rang out loud from the depths of a bottomless spirit. My young soul trembled with something every time a voice was raised in song because the words and notes didn't come from technique or style but from the anguish of life seeking the comfort of God.



A line of converts both young and old dressed in white robes made their way through the gathering to the edge of the water, the old preacher stood out in the water flanked by deacons ready to receive the new converts. The sky was crystal blue shining down on the sparkling water

it was as if God shaped the day just for the occasion. I shall never forget Rev. Fuqua one of the "old school" preachers a farmer by trade, who had the experience and wisdom of the earth engrained in him. Rev. Fuqua wasn't too keen on doctrines and theology he preached simple sermons of the bible. His greatest sermons came from his own life, a simple family man of meager means who charged only \$60 a Sunday for 20+ years. Rev. Fuqua stood in the Tennessee River with arms outstretched and a welcoming smile speaking scriptures.

The strong arms and hands that worked the fields and tended the animals now immersed willing souls into the depths of the water and with the sureness of the rising sun, pulling them back up into a new life of God. Shouts and praises could be heard for miles around as families cried with joy for each new reborn soul. How many tears mingled with water fell on the banks as a repenting new convert made the journey back from water to land. From the arms of the preacher and the depths of the river into the outstretched arms of waiting loved ones. It was an experience that was truly life changing and unforgettable.

The old spot on the banks of the Tennessee River has witnessed many generations of baptisms from slavery-time onward; I consider that old spot sacred ground to this day. If you go there today you can feel the spirit and tranquility wading upon the waters. Many a soul from elderly to children has been reborn upon the waters. The breath of the spirit and

wings of angels have stirred the water from years. Today, the old baptizing spot is grown up with weeds and brush because it's been prohibited to enter the water. People baptize in their churches or go to the local swimming pool and while all of these are fine they can never replace the wonderful experience of an old river baptizing. In my prayers I ask for many things and one of those things is to be a part of an old fashion river baptizing one more time.

Life goes on and as God would have us to evolve and grow we must keep moving forward and making progress. Many of our nation's rivers have become so polluted that it's unsafe to baptize in them. God is the Creator of all things and all the waters of the earth, ready to be sanctified and used in the spiritual rebirth and baptism of others whether from a faucet or creek bed. Since our Hebrew forefather's water has played a vital role in the spiritual life from the ritual baths of the Nazarite to the baptism of Christ by John in the Jordan River ending in the crystal streams of New Jerusalem.



But the preacher has proclaimed that there is nothing new under the sun. What was and has been shall return

again. Over the horizon of the coming years we who are of the true body of Christ shall return to the simple, unadulterated pure worship of God. A small remnant of sincere believers we shall be and we will stand before mankind like mighty boulders just as the old folks of long ago stood on the banks of the Tennessee River. The wisdom of the ages shall shine upon our faces and we shall wear the scars from the storms of life. When we lift our voices in prayer like our fathers before us it shall ring out across the valleys of the world and our songs which flow from the depths of our spirit shall make the mountains tremble.

A time is coming when our children shall walk before us to lead and forge the way, in their lives they will hold wisdom and knowledge of God that surpasses anything we could attain. God's hand will be upon them lifting up a generation before us and we shall step aside and let them lead beginning of a path that promises to go places only God can deliver.

In due time and God's appointed season it will be us who are standing on the banks of the river, with the strength of our years upon us and long traveled paths behind us. We will lift a generation of our youth up with our prayers, songs and our presence. God will grant us the blessing of gazing upon new waters, and a new age of waters, and a new age and we will watch as a generation saves another. Our hearts will be filled with joy as we watch a new chapter unfold in the work of the Lord.

As I gaze out over the Tennessee River I see the passing of “yester-years” and spirit filled baptisms and I see the birth of a new age about to unfold. I look at my children emerging from the church baptismal pool a symbol and promise of what is to come. I am blessed because God has allowed me to see the continuous rebirth of His Holy work among mankind. I am blessed because my eyes have been anointed to see beyond the end and further into a whole new day. The path does not stop with my life or yours it goes on far beyond anything we can imagine. Our life has meaning, more than a twinkle of a star in the dark night, we are stepping stones on the path to eternity we pave the way for our young who will forge ahead and pave the way for their young. Each generation grows closer and closer.

As I watch the sun set in the west and the shadows of the water grow dark a sign of troubling times to come in which those who are true to God will be tried in the fires of life. The world like the river has become polluted and toxic due to the recklessness and greed of man. There those among us today who will fall into the pollution of the world because they dared enter the water too soon. The words of our ancients shall ring true “10,000 shall all by the right side but it shall not touch you”.



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