



# Ravensworth

## BAPTIST CHURCH

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**October 30, 2022 | All Saints' Day, observed**

**Luke 6:20-31**

***Why Baptist?***

**Rev. Dr. Leah Grundset Davis, preaching**

Why Baptist? Who are Baptists? Good questions and ones I am asked all the time when folks are thinking about visiting Ravensworth or have maybe even come through the doors for the first time. I think we know all too well that the Baptists who have the loudest voice in our country wield it for power and political gain. But that's not who all of us are.

Many of us could use a refresher on what the core principles of being Baptist are all about. Don't run out the door! Stick with us through these next few weeks.

I cannot think of a more appropriate day to begin this series than the day where we remember the faithful ones who have gone before us. Because of the faithfulness of so many that we have named this morning, we are Baptist, and we are closer to Jesus because of their lives. They have shared generously, led faithfully, and loved fully.

What do Baptists believe? Why do Baptists believe it? Those are two VERY different questions and have endless answers, but we'll tackle the questions! Over the next few weeks, we'll highlight different areas of Baptist belief. Today,

I'll be talking about the priesthood of the believer, this idea that everyone is connected to God and has a connection with their Creator and needs no intermediary, and while individual connection to God is important, we commit to life in community.

Next Sunday, the Missions Commission will host the Fall Ethics Seminar in worship—in person and livestream, and we'll hear about our mission partners—one of the core Baptist beliefs is that mission is done in partnership, volunteerism stretches across denominations and faith traditions. You do not want to miss this!

On November 13, when we worship **via Zoom**, Rev. Jennifer Hawks from the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty will preach about religious liberty, something else Baptists have believed since their inception, perhaps even the reason why Baptists exist.

And on November 20, Reign of Christ Sunday, Rev. Dr. Michael Catlett will bring it all together in a way that only one who has been a Baptist pastor for 40+ years could!

If Sundays weren't enough to think about being Baptist, then I have a deal for you: we have two really exciting Zoom events this week:

- Tuesday, November 1 at 7pm: [The Alliance of Baptists](#) is hosting their next Prophetic Imagination Gathering, this time to talk about "Knowing Your Church's Past—Bringing Justice." Church leaders from Alliance churches will share what they've learned and how their ministries have changed as they've gotten up close to the stories and lives of those who have struggled with oppression in their context—and met this struggle with the hope of the human soul and a longing for justice." And it's super exciting because RBC will be one of the featured

churches—we'll hear from Geneva Pope and Rev. Caitlyn Gudmundsen about what RBC is working on around our history and our mission!

- And wait, there's more! On Thursday, November 3 at 7pm we are hosting an event alongside Baptist History and Heritage Society called ["Between Dixie and Zion: Southern Baptists in Palestine, Before Israel."](#) The author of the book, Dr. Walker Robbins and Rev. Dr. Allison Tanner, the chair of the Alliance Community for Justice in Palestine and Israel will be presenting.

My Baptist heart is strangely warmed with all these exciting Baptist things, which really is a nerdy joke, as that's a Methodist saying.

Why Baptist for me? My list of Baptist saints is long so I can't tell all the stories. If you have someone in mind, I invite you to hold that person close this morning, Baptist or not—someone who has shaped your faith.

I'll tell you about one of my Baptist saints, who I know I've mentioned before: Dr. Ruth Ann Foster, one of my seminary professors.

Dr. Ruth Ann Foster grew up in the Commonwealth of Kentucky and whenever she could, she donned that Kentucky blue, especially during basketball season. In her small college, she was the only woman enrolled in the religion courses and she soaked them in. After college, she went to seminary when women attending seminary was not the norm. After seminary she decided she was going to get her PhD at Southwestern Seminary in Ft Worth, Texas. She graduated in the late 1970s after finishing her dissertation, but she was not allowed to walk across the stage at graduation. She was the first woman to graduate from Southwestern with a PhD. She accepted her diploma off the stage and moved right into teaching and mentoring students.

When kicked out of Baptist institutions because she was a woman teaching the Bible, she helped to create Truett Seminary at Baylor and was one of our founding professors. She told that story about the most difficult parts of Baptist life and always celebrated the freedom that came from something new, being “true to Baptist principles,” she often said.

At Truett, she poured into every student who crossed her path. I only took Introduction to New Testament with her, but by our second appointment in her office I think she could have told you my life story and recited my social security number! A friend of mine used to go to her office all the time and ask her the most difficult questions—*Am I still Baptist if I don't like potlucks* and more seriously, *What does it mean when we say Baptists believe in priesthood of the believer?*

Dr Foster would lean back in her chair behind her desk, look at you intently, smile and put her hands gracefully on her desk. Then she would say, “If I had all those answers I would be a millionaire with a great book deal. Then she would lean forward and say, *“These are the mysteries of our God. We trust fully in our cloud of witnesses and listen to their voices through the ages.”*

Ruth Ann Foster is one of my voices through the ages, one of my Baptist saints. Dr Foster got sick with cancer during my last year at Truett. She died about seven months later and the seminary still grieves her absence.

Dr. Foster, New Testament scholar extraordinaire is also the person who helped me realize that the Gospel of Luke is my favorite. This is no surprise to anyone who knows me. This passage from Luke 6 gives us some familiar words and then, some very Lukan words as well.

In Luke, this long sermon by Jesus is called “The Sermon on the Plain,” compared to Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount.” And in our passage today, we

hear familiar blessing, but they aren't the ones we hear in Matthew. In fact, in Luke's version of the Beatitudes, they aren't even called that—they are called "Blessings and Woes." Oh Luke! Reminding us that multiple realities exist at once, and yet all are connected to God. I love him!

Luke's blessings and woes are freedom and liberation to individuals and communities!

Each person has a unique connection to God in Luke's blessing and woes, likely even more than one connection. Some might call that priesthood of the believer—the idea that very particular persons are connected to God, and yet fully realized in community. It depends on the fullness of community for people to live out their particularity in freedom! We continue on the way of Jesus together.

In our service today we are looking to the path of those faithful ones who have gone before us and committing ourselves to continuing on the way of Jesus.

I remember a conversation with Ercell Binns, one of our RBC saints a few years before she died when she said that there better be laughter and joy around the memorial garden once she was resting there because she wanted to know we were still living fully in community. If you knew Ercell, long-time teacher and principal, then you know exactly how she said it, and how she made it very clear...that she meant it!

I have to think about our Beloveds in the Memorial Garden this morning, the ones who find their sacred rest there and all the saints who have their fingerprints all over this place--what it must be like to know that alongside them on our RBC Patio and grounds, that children will be squealing with delight about a Trunk and Treat, their faith family is fellowshiping with Anita's breakfast burritos and coffee, and that they rest in the beauty of the space

where life and death coexist, because we commit to remembering, we commit to sharing about their lives.

I think that is what we call resurrection. It is the mystery of God's presence with us after death and into new life, that freedom and liberation are among us.

I can think of nothing more Baptist than acknowledging that multiple realities can be true at the same time.

'Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

'Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

Thanks be to God. Amen.