

Baptized: Topknot and All

Author King Duncan loves to tell the true story of something that happened to his grandfather, the Rev. G.F. Cox, who was a lay pastor in the Methodist church in the circuit-riding days of the denomination.

To understand the story, you must understand that East Tennessee, where his grandfather preached, is by-and-large Baptist country. Even the dogs and cats are Baptists.

In the early days, when people would join the Methodist church, some Baptists had told them that a person could not go to heaven unless they had been baptized “all over” (that is, immersed). A little bit of Methodist sprinkling, they cautioned, would not open the pearly gates.

A rather tall lady came to the Rev. Cox one day wanting to join the Methodist church, but first, she wanted to be baptized by immersion “just in case the Baptists are right.” The Rev. Cox agreed to her request. They scheduled a time to gather the church down by the river for what generally should have been a most beautiful and meaningful occasion. What happened, however, was more humorous than sublime.

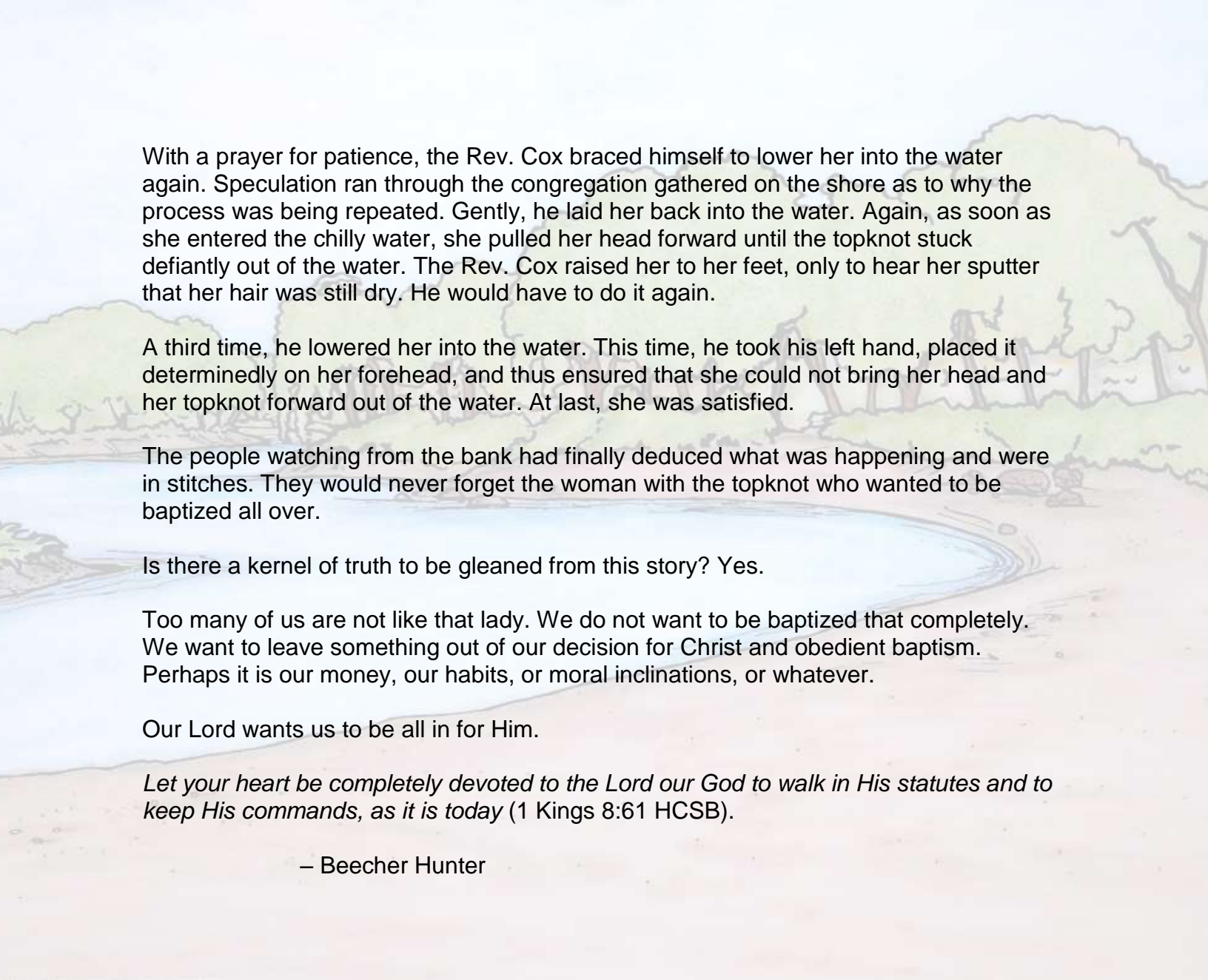
The river was quite shallow that summer, and the woman was rather tall. To make matters worse, she wore her hair in a topknot. For younger readers, a topknot was once a fairly fashionable hairdo in which the hair appeared to spiral upward upon milady’s head for another eight to 12 inches. This particular woman must have approached 7 feet tall, topknot and all. The Rev. Cox, on the other hand, was a man of modest height.

Immersion, of course, is performed by cradling the convert backward into the water as if being buried in the ground and then lifting him or her forward as if being raised to new life. Immersion is not as easy as it looks, particularly if the person being baptized is much larger than the pastor performing the baptism.

The Rev. Cox labored mightily as he eased this tall lady with the topknot backward into a shallow river. As she lay back into the chilly waters, she did what most of us would do under similar circumstances. She jerked her head forward until her chin nearly rested on her chest. This, in turn, kept her topknot from going under the water.

Triumphantly, the Rev. Cox lifted her from the water and stood her upright as the choir sang the last verse of *Shall We Gather at the River*. He had already started for the bank of the river when she stopped him. “My hair is still dry,” she said plaintively. “I’m sorry, Brother Cox. You will have to try it again.” Perhaps she didn’t want to go to heaven without her topknot.

(more)



With a prayer for patience, the Rev. Cox braced himself to lower her into the water again. Speculation ran through the congregation gathered on the shore as to why the process was being repeated. Gently, he laid her back into the water. Again, as soon as she entered the chilly water, she pulled her head forward until the topknot stuck defiantly out of the water. The Rev. Cox raised her to her feet, only to hear her sputter that her hair was still dry. He would have to do it again.

A third time, he lowered her into the water. This time, he took his left hand, placed it determinedly on her forehead, and thus ensured that she could not bring her head and her topknot forward out of the water. At last, she was satisfied.

The people watching from the bank had finally deduced what was happening and were in stitches. They would never forget the woman with the topknot who wanted to be baptized all over.

Is there a kernel of truth to be gleaned from this story? Yes.

Too many of us are not like that lady. We do not want to be baptized that completely. We want to leave something out of our decision for Christ and obedient baptism. Perhaps it is our money, our habits, or moral inclinations, or whatever.

Our Lord wants us to be all in for Him.

Let your heart be completely devoted to the Lord our God to walk in His statutes and to keep His commands, as it is today (1 Kings 8:61 HCSB).

– Beecher Hunter