

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main St.
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
January 10, 2021
Baptism of the Lord Sunday

Prelude

Call to Worship Psalm 29:2-4

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due God's name;
worship the Lord in holy splendor.

The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters.

The voice of the Lord is powerful,
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

Hymn Baptized in Water Gaelic melody; Text: Michael J. Saward, 1981

1 Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,
cleansed by the blood of Christ our King.

Heirs of salvation, trusting the promise,
faithfully now God's praises we sing.

2 Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,
dead in the tomb with Christ our King.

One with his rising, freed and forgiven,
thankfully now God's praises we sing.

3 Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,
marked with the sign of Christ our King;
born of the Spirit, we are God's children;
joyfully now God's praises we sing.

Prayer of Confession

Lord, have mercy on us.

Remember the promises you made to us in our baptism,
forgive our sinful ways
and heal our brokenness.

Set us free from all that enslaves,
and raise us to new life in Jesus Christ,
that we may be your faithful servants,

showing forth healing love to the world,
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news!

In baptism you were buried with Christ.

In baptism you were also raised to new life with him,
through faith in the power of God
who raised Christ from the dead.

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

The old life is gone and a new life has begun.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel:
your sins are forgiven. Be at peace. Amen.

Scripture Reading Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The Morning Message

Swimming With the Jellyfish

Like many of us in high school and college, Sally Haynes had a part time summer job. She was part of an outreach ministry at North Carolina's Outer Banks. That sounds pretty cushy until you learn her job was to clean bath-houses.

On a slow summer afternoon, she walked over to the small sailboat franchise the ministry helped run. Since there were no customers, the manager thought it would be ok for Sally and two of the other boys to take one of the boats out for a brief sail.

Sally says she lazily lounged while the guys steered the little boat. And everything was fine- blue sky, sparkling water, warm sun. And then, the wind took a mighty swing at their sail and the boat capsized, dumping the boys out.

And so there they were. She says she heard the yelps of the boys as soon as they hit the water. They had landed in a school of jellyfish. But, luckily for her, she had landed on the sail. There she sat, on the water, but protected by the sail. No jellyfish around.

The boys started shouting to her, "Sally, get off the sail so we can turn the boat rightside-up!" Sally says she would like to say that as soon as she heard the painful cries of her friends, she bravely leapt off the sail and into the threatening water, but that wasn't her first instinct. Her first instinct was to stay put and be spared the stings that would surely come when she left her billowy nest.

The boys' cries grew louder. The menacing tentacles stung them repeatedly. But Sally knew the moment she crawled off the sail and into the water, she, too, would be stung. I've never been stung by a jellyfish, but I know that no one signs up for that.

But if she didn't move, they would never right the boat and it would be a long, painful, dangerous swim to the shore for all of them.

So, resigned to her fate, she slipped into the water and was indeed immediately and repeatedly stung. They righted the boat and hurried back to shore to dress their wounds.

How quickly things had gone wrong. While things had been fine, beautiful even, on the surface, the water itself held many dangers.

Sally is now a United Methodist minister and has had a long time to reflect on this experience. Now she understands that what happened that summer day was absolutely consistent with Scripture. From the very beginning of salvation history, way back in Genesis, water is the fathomless deep which God created and must divide to make space for the sky to appear. Water must be pushed aside to allow for the emergence of dry land.

The deeps are full of power and mystery. They are where Leviathan and other legends live. And when God brings his people out of slavery, it's once again through the deep, chaotic sea, the hand of God reaching down to part the waters so his children may cross unharmed.

The prophet Isaiah compares God's love to water's dangers:

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you."

We can't help but think of those verses when trouble strikes, especially trouble involving water. Hurricanes, floods, tsunamis and other treacherous weather events have devastated everything from small villages to entire countries, killing generations of God's people. My mother was a baby when the 1937 flood hit Huntington. Her father packed up her mother and her brother and sister and sent them on the train to Milton, where they would stay with grandparents until it was safe to come home. These events define communities for sure. Recovery may be slow and frustrating. The words of Scripture may or may not offer reassurance. But, we have learned that wherever there is suffering, God is there, and that's when we, who are called by Christ's name, jump into the schools of jellyfish with those dumped out of the boat.

Water is necessary to sustain life- for cleansing, for heating and cooling, for growing anything, for transport. And yet, as necessary as it is, water contains the potential of chaos and danger and lurking monsters.

And that is exactly where God sends Jesus at his baptism. Up to this point in the gospel story, Jesus has led a mostly private life. But, his baptism stands as a symbol of transition to a very public ministry. One that will have him teaching, healing, and feeding, calling people to turn away from sin and toward God, to love their neighbors as themselves, to welcome the stranger, help the hurting, and support the weak.

And how does God mark the occasion? God sends Jesus down into the water, where danger and jellyfish are primed to attack. The jellyfish that surround Jesus taunt, ridicule, hail him king in one breath and yell “crucify him!” the next. Stings come from the death of his dear friend, Lazarus, the betrayal of another. Jesus is plunged into the water to be assaulted time and again. The maternal instinct in me wonders why this was necessary. I was hyper-vigilant with our kids. Made them all neurotic, I was so worried about their safety. I wonder how, why, God could send his only Son to earth if this was to be his life and fate.

Maybe it’s because this is the very image of our life and fate, too. Sailing, on the surface, is lovely and peaceful. But, we aren’t always on the surface, are we? Life isn’t always lived in the smooth and lovely and safe places. Life often swamps our boat, and the sea is deep and dark.

Life happens during sleepless nights and hectic days. Life happens in the family we love and the family who gets under our skin. Life happens when the mail brings bills we have to juggle, diagnoses we are never ready to hear, losses that cleave our hearts in two.

But...here’s what gives me hope: When life throws us into water that’s over our heads, and it will, the baptism of Jesus reminds us of this important truth: we aren’t the first ones in. Jesus has already gone ahead of us. He has suffered, he has been hurt and rejected, he has been falsely accused, he has been tired and hungry and thirsty, he has been hauled into court, thrown in jail, separated from his mother, and crucified.

And then...God raised him from the dead, and in his resurrection is the promise of ours. We are plunged into the waters of baptism and raised to newness of life. At our funeral services, we are reminded that, in death, our baptism is complete. Scripture promises us that if we are baptized into a death like his, we will be raised in glory like Jesus before us.

Let that be a comfort to you. Remind yourself that you are baptized. I thought of this recently when a concern was turning over and over in my mind. Martin Luther was said to have reassured himself in troubled moments by stating those three words: “I am baptized.” It worked. I was comforted that yes, indeed, I am baptized, grafted into the body of Christ, welcomed into the family of faith, and marked as Christ’s own forever. Washed, cleansed, made new, set apart for a life of faith, hope, and love.

When the dreaded call comes, or the relationship fractures, or the news out of Washington strikes terror in all of us, remember that Jesus went down into the water before us and came out again, and so, indeed, shall we. So shall we.

Renewal of Baptism

Through baptism we enter the covenant God has established.

In that covenant God gives us new life.

We are guarded from evil

and nurtured by the love of God and God's people.

In embracing that covenant, we choose whom we will serve,

by turning from evil and turning to Jesus Christ.

I ask you, therefore, to reject sin,

to profess your faith in Christ Jesus,

and to confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we baptize.

Renunciations

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world? *I do.*

Do you turn to Jesus Christ, accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love? *I do.*

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?

I will with God's help.

Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;**

who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, dead, and buried;

he descended into hell;

the third day he rose again from the dead;

he ascended into heaven,

and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost,

The holy catholic church:

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

**the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Thanksgiving Over the Water

Eternal and gracious God, we give you thanks.

In countless ways you have revealed yourself in ages past,
and have blessed us with signs of your grace.

We praise you for sending Jesus your Son,
who for us was baptized in the waters of the Jordan,
and was anointed as the Christ by your Holy Spirit,
who teaches us and leads us into all truth,
filling us with a variety of gifts
that we might proclaim the gospel to all nations
and serve you as a royal priesthood.

Pour out your Spirit upon us

And upon this water,

That this font may be your womb of new birth.

May all who pass through these waters be delivered from death to life,

From bondage to freedom,

From sin to righteousness.

Bind them to the household of faith,

Guard them from all evil.

Strengthen them to serve you with joy

Until the day you make all things new.

To you be all praise, honor, and glory;

Through Jesus Christ our Savior,

Who with you and the Holy Spirit,

Lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

O Lord, uphold all who have renewed their vows today by your Holy Spirit.

Daily increase in them your gifts of grace:

the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might,

the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord,

the spirit of joy in your presence.

We turn our hearts and minds to those known to us, and to those known only by you, in need or distress. Come alongside them so that they may be comforted by your presence, compassion, and

love. Encourage all of us to maintain safe health practices and to help make those available for all your children near and far away. We give you thanks for those who are on the road to health and wholeness and all who practice the healing arts even at risk to their own safety.

As we begin a new year, so, too, do many organizations, endeavors, and government services. Give all who work for the public good be strengthened in their work and guided by honesty and integrity.

Charge and Blessing

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

With all humility and gentleness,

with patience, bearing with one another in love,

making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

Go now in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude