

January 7, 2024
Baptism of the Lord Sunday

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*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 81 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, verses 1-3

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.**

Hymn Take, O Take Me As I Am

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.

First Reading Genesis 1:1-5

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Mark 1:4-11

The Morning Message

Who had a summer job in high school or college? Like many of us, 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, who were just one and two, 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.

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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. Thankfully, they have all overcome that history and have proven to be much braver than their mom. But, about Jesus, I often wondered 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. My parents had a boat out on Beech Fork Lake and it was a lot of fun. It’s pretty tame-a no wake zone. 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, abused, 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. It was a comfort to remember that yes, indeed, I am baptized, grafted onto 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 or Charleston or in our family strikes terror in us, remember that Jesus went down into the water before us and came out again, and so, indeed, shall we. So shall we.

*Hymn Baptized In Water (insert)

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.

Remember your baptism and be thankful

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p.35

*Hymn Gloria Patri (inside front cover of hymnal)

The Sacrament of Communion

Invitation to the Table, Words of Institution, Great Prayer of Thanksgiving,
Distribution of the Elements

Prayer After Communion

We thank you, O God, that through Word and Sacrament, you have given us your Son, who is the true bread of heaven and food of our eternal life. So strengthen us in your service that in our daily living we may show forth our thanks, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

*Hymn Doxology (inside front cover of hymnal)

*Prayer of Dedication

As your Son Jesus came to bring light to the world's darkness, we bring our gifts to you this day. Transform them into light for the lost, bread for the hungry, relief for the hopeless, compassion and care for the forgotten and oppressed. In joyful service, let us bear Christ's light into the world. Amen.

*Hymn 289 Blessed Assurance

*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