

SERMON: "Passing Through the Waters" - April 27, 2008

Do you know your baptism story? How old you were. What you were wearing. What people attended? What church were you baptized in? We remember our birthday but do we remember the date we were baptized? I think too many of us don't. Danny, Becky, and Waverly remember who was here today, and the date and celebrate Maddy's baptism as she would her birthday. The Sacrament of baptism has become in many cases an empty ritual. We have lost the meaning. Like many traditions we keep the actions but lose what they mean.

So this morning the sermon is about the meaning of baptism. To help us recapture the essence of the Sacrament in our faith community and in our personal lives. I will be using the 1 Peter text on our journey.

To understand 1 Peter's view on baptism we have to understand their faith journey. Baptism in this community was not child or infant baptism. It was, what we call an affirmation of faith baptism, or an adult baptism. The Sacrament is the same the baptism may highlight different meanings. For infant and children baptism, that we witnessed this morning, we see before us the excess grace that God pours over us. Maddy does nothing to earn this baptism. She just lets the waters pour over her head. Does she understand it all? No, but that is why she needs her family and a faith community to help her grow in her faith and the meaning of baptism. Unfortunately, too many times once the child is baptized we don't see them any more. Baptism is seen more like a baby shower than becoming part of a faith community to grow in.

In adult baptism there are different meanings that are highlighted. These meanings are highlighted in the 1 Peter passage. It is important for us to understand these meanings, because this is what we are to teach our children, and it helps us remember that our baptisms initiated us on a journey.

1. In baptism we are spiritually cleansed. Peter refers to this in verse 21, “and baptism which is prefigured saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God,…” Every Sunday the Assurance of Pardon should be done at the font. For these baptism waters remind us that we are cleansed in Christ’s risen spirit.

How many of you worked outside yesterday, in the beautiful warm weather we had? What does it feel like when you have worked in the dirt all day long? You feel dirty and grimy. What is the first thing you want to do when come inside? You want to take a shower and get clean. Do you know the feeling of renewal and cleansing after a great shower? That renewal is the same sense for our souls every Sunday after the Assurance of Pardon. All week we have dirt cling to our souls. We say a curt word to someone. WE think unkind thoughts. We walk pass by people who are in need. We come to church with our souls dirty and then we are cleansed in Christ risen spirit. This is all possible by the grace of Jesus Christ poured out over us in baptism.

2. Baptism is a covenant relationship between God and the person being baptized. Peter makes this connection when he refers to the Noah story where God and Noah make a covenant. In fact God puts the rainbow in the sky to

remind God of the covenant. In this covenant God agrees never to destroy the whole earth with a flood. The water that Noah, his family, and animals passed through were waters of destruction. The waters we pass through are waters that save and lead us to live differently. In baptism God covenants, pledges, promises to give us God's grace, love, peace, and joy. But this is not a one way covenant. We make promises as well when we can affirm our faith for ourselves as teens or adults. When we confirm or affirm our faith we promise to live a certain way of life. This way is culturally different from God's way. When we affirm our baptism vows in joining the church our confirming our faith for the first time we say we will not condone the way of evil. We will not condone ways of destruction. We will live in ways that give life. We will give and not take away. We will see others with eyes of compassion as God sees us. When we do this we can love our neighbors as ourselves. We can focus our lives in serving God with all of our being, heart, mind, and strength. We belong to God through Jesus Christ and we will live our lives so that others will see whom we belong to.

Today we made a covenant with Maddy before God and each other. To teach her, nurture her along with Becky and Waverly in the faith of Jesus Christ. When we care for her in the nursery she is learning that you care for her out your loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When you will teach her in Sunday School you are teaching her the way of life as she belongs to God. When we mentor her as we wal3wsxk beside her and have conversation with her as she deals with faith questions. If we do not teach, nurture, or mentor Maddy, she will never know the goodness that God offers her. She will not know of the

“good conscience” that she must live her life in. She will never know of the rich covenant between her and God.

3. The third meaning has to do with the power of the risen Christ. This is essential in a Christian's life. Due to the power of the risen Christ we are spiritually cleansed. Through the power of the risen Christ we can pledge ourselves to God. Through the power of the risen Christ we can be given strength to live out our pledge. Through the power of the risen Christ that is enacted and given to us in baptism we can endure suffering when we do the right thing.

When I put my hand down in the waters I depict the death of Christ and when I raise my hand out of the waters I have us remember the resurrection that we are participate in as well. In times of suffering, it is the participation of the resurrection that empowers us each day to carry one. This is Peter's encouragement to the congregation he is writing to and it is our encouragement as well. It is through the risen Christ that we are given hope that new life will come. It is in the risen Christ that we can endure and even be triumphant through suffering because the risen Christ within us has been victorious.

There is injustice in our world. I have experienced in as a woman in ministry. But I am not bound by the injustice in the baptism of the risen Christ I can rise above it and minister as he calls me to and not be bitter. Not

be down trodden. I do not let society determine what I can and cannot do. I depend on my risen Lord to empower me to carry out the ministry he has called me to.

We must teach our children that they are not bound and limited as society standards due to the color of their skin, their the gender, or their abilities or disabilities. They are engulfed in power of the resurrection so that they will succeed in being the child, youth, man, or woman that God calls them to be. Will they suffer on this earth being who God calls them to be, most certainly. But they are given the power to rise above it.

Our baptism isn't just to remember on the date we were baptized, but every Sunday we walk into the sanctuary. As we touch the water we are to remember the grace of God poured over us and into our lives. Every Sunday I pray you remember the way to life that brings life to you and to others.. It will be different than how others live, but will save your life. Every time you raise you hand out of the waters as you touch it, remember the power of the risen Christ is in you and you will rise out of any suffering. Every Sunday as we pass our hands through the water let us remember we lead our lives not out of own ability but only in the grace of God that gifts us and empowers us to do so.

Baptism is significant in our lives as people of faith. It defines who we are and whose we are. I pray that that the next time you participate in or witness a baptism it is not an empty ritual. Is indeed a Sacrament. We see the gift God has given us through the life, death, and resurrected Jesus Christ, and we make a solemn pledge to live our lives committed to God.

