

Year A, Lent III
March 19, 2017
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Several years ago during a family trip to Alberta, Canada, we went rafting trip on the Athabasca River. We were between Banff and Jasper National Parks along a stretch of the Canadian Rockies with many glaciers. Consequently the water was very cold, and we had to wear wet suits while rafting and paddling. Our guide told us that the water had been frozen for thousands of years and at the same time was only a few hours old- meaning we were so physically close to the source that the water had only very recently melted, drop by drop, puddled, run down a ledge and joined with countless other drops to form living water. To prove his point, one needed only to jump in the water- it was very cold. It felt like it had just been transformed from a solid to a liquid.

In our Christian way of thinking- transformation leads to justification. Justification means “put in right relationship with God”. Paul speaks of justification being achieved through the blood of Jesus. We are reconciled to God through the cross. The curse of Adam and Eve is broken because of Jesus’ sacrificial offering. In the early church, one needed only to point to the cross as proof of God’s love for us. The cross is the ultimate paradox- a symbol of death is transformed and becomes the means of life.

Israel’s ultimate symbol of justification was the Exodus event. The relationship was sealed through the giving of the law. No sooner were the tablets inscribed than the community said, “Prove it!”

The story of Moses striking the rock is an important one on many levels. First it shows us that Moses’ job was a risky one. That they were ready to stone him was not hyperbole. Later in their journey there would be a full-blown revolt that he put down with force. Moses is revered now, but it was not always so.

Second, water from the rock becomes an important symbol for Israel and the church. Paul says that the rock was Christ! We also understand water in the baptismal sense- the living water. Living water is the means by which Christians come into right relationship with God.

Have you ever wondered why the Samaritan woman was doing such tough work at high noon instead of in the cool of the morning? She was not in right relationship with her community. The women of good standing would not have her when they came in the morning. So there she is, in the heat and isolated. Enter Jesus who promises to quench her thirst and justify her forever.

Near the end of the conversation Jesus reveals his true identity as the Messiah, "I am he" (John 5:37). From this basis she then begins to witness to the people of Sychar. Notice that Jesus doesn't go to the "in" crowd. Instead he goes to the marginalized Samaritan woman. She is justified through her encounter with Jesus, and because of her witness and eventual encounters with Jesus, so are the citizens of Sychar.

Several weeks ago I was privileged to baptize one of our Little School Students during our regular Thursday morning chapel service. The joy on the little boy's face would have been enough, but God added an extra blessing through the expressions and curiosity of the 60 other children and teachers in the room. They were fascinated to observe this ancient ritual and understood in their own way that it was a special event. I continue to be amazed that prayer and a few cups of water can be so transformative. Baptism is a once and for all event that most of us don't recollect because we were so young. Even though we know God loves us, like the wandering Israelites sometimes say, "Prove it".

If baptism is a once and for all event, and happened to most of us in a pre-conscious means, how are we reminded of our justification- our right relationship with God? Through the altar. We stand around this altar and pray the words of institution; Providence is delivered through unleavened bread and port wine that have been transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. Like the melting glacier it is something very old that is also new in the blink of an eye. God is relentless. Every time we ask for proof we are reminded that we are justified because of Jesus. Through our baptism and nurtured through the altar we are reminded of just how deep the love runs. *Amen.*