



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

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"Grace to you and peace."

I just returned from a family reunion. Fifty-six years ago my mother and her five siblings and spouses created this event, and over the years it has become even more significant. In the early days, when the 29 cousins (of which I am the oldest) were younger, we would rent a Bible Camp for a week every other year. Now because of busier schedules, the reunion takes place every third year, and only for a long weekend. The original siblings and spouses who numbered twelve now are down to six, all of them in their 80's. Because of the rapid increase of these siblings' great grandchildren, we again had close to 90 people in attendance.

On Sunday morning it is always customary to create a worship experience. Of course there have always been enough Thompson clergy in attendance to provide pastoral leadership. In more recent years one cousin married a musician par excellence who is always willing to organize a choir. This year she included eight or ten of the little ones, including three of our granddaughters. To hear them sing "Borning Cry" and "God Bless America" brought tears to our eyes.

Also it is common to ask one or two from the group to share what God has been doing in their life since the last reunion, we usually ask those who have faced significant challenges. Our daughter-in-law, who is a native of Sri Lanka, talked about the tragedy of the tsunami upon her people, and how God is working through some members of her family and countless others to bring healing and hope to the devastated nation.

My cousin's daughter sounded like Job as she shared about the recent death of her mother, and then shortly thereafter her grandmother, and then her kidney transplant. She talked about the power of prayer when she fell into a deep coma for more than a week. But now she is doing remarkably well, and she witnessed to all of us about her faith and her love for God and for all of us.

For a meditation I read from Isaiah 55, where it reads, *"Come to the water! Come to the water, all who are thirsty, come to the water."* I recalled how our parents had grown up next to the water, our grandparents were missionaries to Madagascar and their six children lived right next to the Indian Ocean. Each of our family reunions have taken place near to water; water seems to be a metaphor for our family and for the new life of the Spirit. Come to the water!

Also I mentioned that water has been significant at several reunions in the Sacrament of Baptism, where water joined the Word and created new life. *"Come to the water"* finds its ultimate expression Baptism, or as the Scriptures tell us, *"unless one is born of water and of Spirit, one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."* Fifty-two years ago we baptized my cousin, nine and six years ago we baptized our grandchildren. There is power in the water.

I also used a story that I had read in the Duluth paper when we lived there. A budding poet grew up in that city and as an adult moved away to start his career. He married a woman and they settled down to create a life together. But tragically, both his wife and new child died in childbirth. The young man, seriously distraught, decided to return to Duluth, swim out into the vast expanses of Lake Superior as far as he could go, and then just sink to the bottom.

But when he arrived at the lake, when he was overcome by the beauty, the wonder, the mystery, the "lake effect," all he could do was cry. Tears of grief, tears of pain, tears of release came out, finally crying himself to sleep on the shore. When he awakened a short time later, he found that someone had placed a wool blanket over him, put a thermos of coffee and a peanut butter and jam sandwich nearby and left a note for him. The note said, "the lake will heal you." The lake will heal you.

This young man discovered what so many others have found in history, the healing power of water. Isaiah knew this full well when he wrote, *"Come to the water, come to the water, all who are thirsty, come to the water."* He was writing to people who had just returned from the devastation of the exile, who had suffered inestimable hardship, and now the prophet was inviting them to come to the water. There is power and healing in the water.

I went on to comment how important water had been in the lives of so many of us in our family. When we visited our ancestor's homes in Norway, we found that most of them came from the fjords and lakes of the country. Since then many of us in our family have settled nearby to water, some in Minnesota, some on both coasts. I did express some sympathy for the families of the one sibling who settled in southeastern South Dakota and the other who settled in Albuquerque, NM, where the only water is in the bathtub. I was only mildly booed.

When Pastor Mike called me to consider coming to Hope, I mentioned to him that my office at First Lutheran in Duluth had a magnificent view of Lake Superior. I assumed that I probably had the best view of any church in the country, gazing out at the Rose Garden and the numerous sailboats and 1,000 foot ore boats going to and fro. Mike mentioned that Hope also had water, there was this beautiful pond and he would try to find me an office with a view of that water. So far I have been underwhelmed by the aesthetics of that body of water.

A friend of ours wrote a piece describing the power of the water as she gazed upon Lake Superior: "Local weather prognosticators talk about the "lake effect" to explain some strange weather patterns. To me the lake effect refers to more than the weather. I have known the lake to soothe troubled souls and elicit great joy. It has a way of touching a person's emotions and putting them into perspective. I am sure that the lake has been the recipient of many tears of joy, sorrow, anger and frustration. It has also been the witness to many prayers, confessions, wishes and proposals."

A biblical commentary calls this passage in Isaiah 55 *"a verse for the spiritually dissatisfied, for everyone who has dried up inside, who is spiritually thirsty, these words are for them."* Everyone who is thirsty, come to the water. Come and drink.

Isaiah goes on to say later in the chapter that when we come to the water, when we come and drink, God will give to us an everlasting covenant, just like the one given to King David. Just think about that, whenever we come to the water, God offers us an everlasting covenant. A covenant is a promise that God will always be with us, never abandon us, never let us go. Come to the water, receive the covenant.

This image of water is continued in Luke 4, where Jesus meets a woman from Samaria at a well. Here Jesus offers the woman "living water." He says that anyone who drinks from this well will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that he will give will never be thirsty again. In fact, Jesus says, the water that I give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. That is rather expressive, the spring of water will gush up inside of us. The woman then said to Jesus, "Sir, give me this water."

Come to the water. Jesus offers us living water. All who are thirsty, come to the water. All who are living lives which are parched and dry, come to the water. There is something about the water which gives life. Later this month Jackie and I are visiting beautiful Flathead Lake in Montana and the Pacific Ocean in Washington and Oregon, there is something about the water.

And when you are wandering through the office area, stop by my office and see the breathtaking view I have of water. Better yet, stop and reflect at the prayer garden, where the water is always flowing. Come to the water.