

From These Waters
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Water is the source of all life. We learn this in science class...we learn how water makes up over 80% of all the earth. There are like 326 million trillion gallons of water on the earth (that is greater than the national debt) and it is constantly cycling...from the oceans to the rains, into the plants, through our bodies, to the lakes, to the rivers and back to the oceans. This cyclical pattern is echoed in our liturgical calendar as well...we move through the church years in an ever growing spiral...as do the waters of life. And the same waters that were once moving in the Pacific Ocean or flowing down the mighty Mississippi River are the same waters that the spirit of God hovered over in the very beginning of creation. Okay so take a moment and wrap your brain around that for a moment. The waters that just filled our baptismal font this morning...the waters that dripped onto the forehead of William are the same waters that God ordered in the very beginning of time. And these same waters will one day join the waters of the Gulf and rain down on the fields of a farmer a thousand miles away from here, will one day find their way to becoming an iceberg floating in the Arctic and they might become the tears that he will wipe away in his old age. Scientists tell us that there really is no NEW water that water constantly recycles itself...now it's all coming back to you now isn't...3rd Grade Earth Science, those Rain Cycle Charts, didn't think you'd ever use that information again did ya? Water is the source of all life and always has been...from the watery chaos of the beginning of creation to the water flowing from our kitchen sinks it is a crucial part of our lives. You could go without food for 40 days but you could not go without water for more than 7 days.

Baptism is the sign and seal that we belong to God...that we are a part of the community of faith. How amazing is it that water is the tool used to bring us into the household of God. Water the very source of life, the one element that has been there since the beginning of time is what we use in this sacrament. As Presbyterians we have infant baptism and there are those who believe the beauty of this sacrament is wasted on the young...however for us it is the purest way to affirm that God claims us before we can claim God... in baptism God marks us as his own before we can even utter a word. The instruction is always given to the parents and the congregation to help the infant to grow in the faith and remember their baptism. We are told to remember our own baptism every time we come to the font...but this is very difficult to remember when we were say 6 weeks old. But our own baptism looked very much like the one we saw this morning...the words used have been the same words for centuries. The triune rubric, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is the same one given to us by Christ. One of my seminary New Testament professors, Lewis Donelson preached a sermon on baptism while I was a student. He shared his experience of baptisms growing up in Idelwild Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee. He said that his family sat toward the middle back of the sanctuary and that from his childself point of view that baptisms seemed to be a bunch of people in dark suits and black robes would huddle around the baptismal font and murmur

(this was before the days of wireless mics and frequent use of lapel mics). He likened the huddle to one like at a football game. Huddling around the font the group would then break with the newest child of God that he could never really see. He said that when he became a pastor it was very important to him to walk the baby around the sanctuary so that everyone could now see the child that they had covenanted with to nurture in the life of the church. Now that is a baptismal image that one cannot forget too easily. But it is a reminder that baptism is something that should be talking about more, something that we should remember and claim every day. We are the children of God claimed in the waters of baptism.

So it is the waters flowing from the font that claim us at baptism. That brings us into this community of faith, this community that nurtures us and teaches us and worships with us.

Too often we think about baptism as an event in the past. It is also a reality in the present. Baptism is about now. {The Montreat Youth Conference theme this year was “In These Waters.” Each day a different passage illustrated how the waters remind us that we belong to God in good times and bad. On Tuesday we dealt with the storms of life...the hard times when it seems like the waters will overcome us.} The waters that claim us at the font remind us that we are a community...a community that stands with one another—calling one another accountable when necessary, but also weeping with us when the tears flow. In the story of Job, we find Job in the ash pit, mourning, suffering and quietly scraping his wounds with the shards there in the ashes. His three friends: Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz hear of his suffering and they come. Scholars point out that it is very ritualistic the manner in which Job’s friends approach him. They rend their clothing, weep loudly, throw ashes upon their heads and then they just sit with Job quietly for seven days. Seven days was the same number that friends & family would sit Shiva with the dead. For seven days...a full week Job and his 3 friends sit together in the ashes. Now later they will open their mouths with “words of comfort & wisdom” but they all seem to suffer from foot in mouth disease. There is more comfort in the silence of their companionship there in the ashes. Sometimes in the community of faith there are no words necessary...just the very presence of others in times of suffering. As a chaplain intern that was something we had to learn that our very presence was often MORE than enough...the family didn’t need “perfect” words from us when they are faced with the death of a loved one, they needed the comfort of knowing someone from the faith community was with them in their time of grieving. This can be quite a difficult thing for us...to just sit with another is not to flutter around trying to fix things; it is not seeking for words when none are necessary. It is to sit in the moment and recognize that all in the community of faith know what it is to suffer even God. The waters of the font once again flow into our lives through the community of faith and offer comfort. To recognize that you are baptized in the name of the one who suffered on the cross is to claim the restorative powers of God.

The waters also flow out from the font to remind us of the prophetic words of Amos, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” To be the community of faith we must speak out against injustice, we must serve others in

need, we must be a prophetic voice in the wilderness. The waters that wash over us at baptism call us to share in the mission of Christ.

The waters flow out from the font and remind us that we are a part of the community of faith, something greater than we will understand in this lifetime. That we are in a covenant community, to nurture one another and to (when necessary) admonish one another. We are a people who can claim the living water of Jesus Christ in the waters of our baptism. I am sure many of you have noticed this little water bottle up here on the pulpit and are curious as to why I have not drunk from it. This bottle is from Montreat. At the beginning of the conference every church was invited to bring a bottle of water from their home to pour in the font to remind us that we come from many places but we are joined together by the waters of creation. At the end of the week the waters became very stagnant and kind of icky sitting in the font on the stage—in fact little creatures began to grow in the waters. Isn't that the way it is, if the waters become stagnant then they fester and become unusable. But if the waters are moving and growing then they become living water that can sustain life in good ways. So, it was into these waters that representatives from each church their filled their bottles once again to take these waters home with them as a reminder that we are all called to go out from these waters into the world to serve the mission of Christ in our communities and our world. These waters now join the waters of our community.

Martin Luther would remind himself daily that he was baptized. He would place his hand on his head and say the words, "I am baptized, I am baptized, I am baptized." He would repeat the claim as a reminder that he was a child of God...that he belonged to the community of faith, that no matter what devils and snares would pull on him, he knew that he belonged to the Alpha and Omega...the one that ordered the watery chaos at the beginning of time, the one that claimed him in the waters of his own baptism and the one that claimed him when his baptism was complete in death. Here again those words, "I am baptized, I am baptized, I am baptized." These are not words of a past event; these are words very much in the present. You may not remember the feeling of the waters flowing over your head but being a member of the baptized community is about the NOW. Within your heart, the believer's heart should flow the living waters. It is a present reality that brings us into community calling us into the mission of Jesus Christ. Again repeat, "I am baptized, I am baptized, I am baptized." The waters are flowing from the font into your hearts, into your service, into the community of faith, into the world we must take these waters with us wherever we go, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.