

Pastor John Schwehn
Christ the King Lutheran Church
Trinity Sunday, Year A, 2017

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Matthew 28:16-20

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Quite an opening line, isn't it? “The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the *waters*.”

The waters. In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the very first thing to appear were *the waters*. Even before those famous first words of God, “Let there be light”...there was *water*! And then there was light.

And from these waters God created a whole world suspended in a vast universe, a blue planet of water and ice. And it was good.

And from these waters dry land appeared, and so the waters surrounding the land took on a form of their own and we called them *seas*. And God said that it was good. And after the waters caused lush vegetation to grow across the land, next God created water animals. They came first: orca whales and sharks, dolphins and belugas, walleye and pike, clownfish and sea anemone. And then the birds. And to all of these water creatures – before humans were around – God said, “Be fruitful and multiply!” And it was good.

And then came the land creatures who would gather at the waters to drink and bathe and find their sustenance and food. And then, when the humans came, they were created *in God's own image*. And guess what? No surprise here, but you and me, these bodies of ours, are 65% water! Just like the planet, being created in the image of God biologically means that we're composed of a whole lot of H₂O.

(So came the first man and the first woman and God kept creating and creating and creating. And then God created Thatcher Carson and Corynn Kronzer and Harper Wimsett, and it was so very good indeed!)

My friends, we worship a God who is *obsessed* with water! I apologize if I'm making you all thirsty as I preach about water on this humid summer day...but pay attention to this thirst, too! You need water, I need water, this planet needs water, all of us need water.

And, as people who are created in God's image, we also are obsessed with water. I would wager that most of you here have a body of water in mind that is particularly sacred and special – waters where you can sit on the shore and feel at peace. Waters where you can jump in and feel that shock of cold water on a hot summer's day. Waters where you love to go to play, to float, to dive, to be made clean. Turn to a person next to you and share the name of a lake or river or pool or bathtub that is particularly close to your own heart.

I think of the water protectors who captured my attention last fall – The Standing Rock Sioux tribe of Native Americans, joined by hundreds of other tribes across the country, stood in opposition to an oil pipeline that would run through their sacred lands, and most significantly beneath the Missouri and Cannon Ball rivers, the only source of fresh water to their community.

These water protectors' simple refrain of resistance was simply, "Water is life."

Water is life. Not only are we water, not only does life need water for survival, but water itself is a sacred gift of God. Water is life: it is the life that fills our bodies, but also it points us back towards our Creator, towards the One who first gave us the gift of water, of life, of promise.

Water is life.

And so how wise it was of God, when he came to us in Jesus, to give us a gift – a gift called baptism. No longer would water simply refresh and sustain us. Water would become an everpresent and sacred sign of God’s promise to love us and be with us always.

When we are washed in the waters of baptism, we enter into the family of God, a family that follows in a way of love and justice and life for all. When we are washed in the waters of baptism, we are refreshed and made clean – we are defined by God’s belovedness and not by our human capacities towards selfishness, suspicion, and destruction. We are defined by the eternal life promised by God, and not by the fear of death, which threatens to hang over us like a cloud.

Water is life. And, in the waters of baptism, we are made free to live this life that God has so graciously given to each of us. We are made free to love, made free to follow in the way of love, made free to trust that there is nothing we can do that will ever again separate us from the great Love who created us.

In our gospel reading this morning, we find the disciples in a terrified state. Jesus was dead, or so they thought. Rumors were swirling around that maybe Jesus’ body had been stolen from the tomb, that it wasn’t really empty. Still, nervously, these disciples gather on the mountaintop where Jesus had told them to go.

There, for the first time, the resurrected Jesus appears to them. “When they saw him, they worshipped him,” Matthew’s gospel said. “But some doubted.”

And so Jesus looks with love upon all of them – those who worship *and* those who doubt – and to all of them he says, “Go. Go and baptize.” In other words, go and tell everyone about the good news of a loving God and take them to their summer lake cabins or backyard streams across Greece and Mesopotamia and the whole world and get them soaking wet!

I can picture the ones who doubted, upon hearing this great commission, awkwardly raising their hands. “But we doubt,” they would say to Jesus. “Don’t we need to be more sure about this whole thing before we start taking people to rivers and lakes and dunking them?”

And here, in this Great Commission story of Matthew’s gospel, is the good news for us. Even the doubters are called baptizers. Even those who aren’t quite sure are invited to go to the water’s edge, to trust in the mercy and love and forgiveness of a God who will never have doubts about *them*.

The night of our wedding, after the ceremony and the eating and the dancing were over, I was feeling so happy to be married and excited for the future, but I still had these lingering doubts. After all, promising to be with Anna until I died was a pretty big deal, and the gravity of it was still settling in. But then, just as these feelings began to take hold, a few of our friends found Anna and me and dragged us to the lake. You see, our wedding ceremony was at Luther Crest Camp in Alexandria, MN, right on the shores of Lake Carlos. So that’s where we went.

When we got to the shore, at the end of a long night, we began to see through the pitch darkness that dozens of our friends and relatives were swimming! At night! They pulled us in with them, and we spent the end of that long and joyous day swimming under the stars, and I wasn’t nervous or afraid anymore.

As we baptize three little ones this morning, they will be washed in these same waters, the waters that God created at the beginning of the world. And we wash them as babies because, for us and for God, their entry into this family doesn’t depend on them understanding the faith or walking through life without mistake or doubt or sin. In fact, we know that they will have plenty of questions, that they will face challenges. We know that they, like us, will suffer and grieve along life’s journey.

Even as I look today at the sacred waters of this beloved blue planet, we see that the seas are warming, sea levels are rising, icecaps are melting. We see hurricanes and disaster. We wonder what our world is becoming, what the future might hold for these children and for us.

Nonetheless, we wash and we trust. We follow in the way of Christ whose love tells us to get up and go. "Go and baptize," Jesus says. Wash one another in the grace and mercy of God. Jump into the lakes and rivers of this world and remember that you are called beloved, and that God will never leave you.

So go. Get into the water! Be made clean! Connect your faith to the local watersheds, to the bathtub, to the tap water, to the cold mountain lakes and streams. When you get to that favorite lake of yours this summer, jump in and remember that somehow, mysteriously, you are being washed in God's goodness and love. Give thanks that you are baptized. Water is life. AMEN.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

Water

Talk about the "Flood Prayer" for baptisms

Written by Luther

Stories all through the Bible about water

Noah's Flood especially...like we're all on a ship together making our way through the waters (which animal would you be?)

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight. Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family, and through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom. At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit. By the baptism of Jesus' death and resurrection you set us free from the power of sin and death and raise us up to live in you.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word, that those who are washed in the waters of baptism may be given new life. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.