

Remembering Baptism

Baptism

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, May 13, 2012 as Baptism

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

As I've said to you before, I almost always stick with the Lectionary texts when preparing my sermons, and this morning's Gospel lesson is a particularly good one. But as you may have noticed [from the bulletin,] we have a big baptism [at the 10:00 service] this morning, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to talk about one of my favorite subjects, to share with you a few things about water (set basin and ewer on the side of the pulpit).

You know, water (pour water from the ewer into the basin) can be a dangerous thing. My first distinct memory of water is standing with my father on the banks of Greenville Creek, though in Ohio we pronounced it, "crick." I was five and it was the first time that I had been invited to join my dad for a day of fishing on the crick in my uncle's boat. "Water can hurt you," he said, "you've got to take it seriously." He went on to give me some rules to follow, things to do and things not to do, so that I would be safe around the water. Water *can* be dangerous, destructive, even deadly.

These waters (pour water into the basin), the waters of baptism, are also dangerous, my friends. Some of you have heard about another day I remember on the banks of Greenville Crick, standing with my friend Johnny Hicks. We watched my dad, the minister dressed in his white shirt and tie, his brown pants and his special "baptizing shoes," leading people down into the muddy water. As we watched him dunking people beneath the water, Johnny observed, "You know, someone could get *hurt* doin' that." You know, Johnny was right on the mark. Be *warned* before you enter these waters. There is danger here. Baptism is a kind of death. It destroys who we were, drowning our old nature, burying it in a watery grave. Paul said it best when he said that we are buried with Christ by baptism, so that as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might walk in newness of life.

The next most vivid memory I have of water (pour) is when I was about nine years old and my youngest brother, Doug, was three. We had been playing in our backyard in Phoenix, using the garden hose in new and probably unacceptable ways in one of Mom's flower beds. By the time my dad happened upon our happy little band, we were all a mess. But being the youngest and most gullible, Doug had been *literally* coated from head to toe in mud and muck and mire. Mom might have taken us inside and cleaned us up. But Dad took a more direct approach. Ordering us all onto the stones of the patio, he turned the hose on us. Now I don't know if it just seemed the right thing for him to do, or if he just had mud in places the rest of us had avoided, but Doug decided to go for the whole treatment. He shucked off his shorts, undies and all, and flung his arms out to his side so that the water could find every part of him. As Dad turned off the hose and the Arizona sun began to dry us off, Doug danced up and down and shouted, "Daddy, I feel so clean!"

The waters of baptism (pour) are also cleansing waters. Baptism is the Father's bath for his soiled children. Baptism means that the flood of God's grace and forgiveness poured out in Jesus Christ have washed away our sins, so we do not *have* to live our lives in the grime and the corruption and the decay of this sinful world. Through our baptism we can feel *so* clean!

I remember one hot afternoon at Maryvale pool, (pour) about six blocks from our house. I was always the smallest kid in my class when I was a boy, so I usually wasn't among the "crowd." The summer I turned eleven, though, I got the chance to go to Maryvale pool quite often and hang out there with some of my classmates. I guess being short's not so noticeable when everyone's bobbing in the water. My memory is of the day when several of them grabbed me while the lifeguard wasn't looking. As I squealed and struggled, they picked me up by my arms and legs and carried me to side of the pool. As they swung me back and forth, they shouted, "One, two, three..." and sent me soaring in a high arc through the air to land splashing in the cool water of the pool. To tell the truth, I did not mind it at all. In

fact, as I pulled myself back up on the side of the pool, I was laughing with everyone else. Because I knew what this dunking meant. It meant I really *was* a part of the group; I was one of them.

When you enter the waters of baptism (pour) you, too, are initiated – into a family – God’s family. Baptism means you have been adopted as sons and daughters of God. You are accepted. You belong to Christ, to his church, to each generation of Christians throughout history. You are sealed as Christ’s own forever!

I cut my foot very badly the summer I turned thirteen. (pour) I wasn’t paying attention to some broken glass that I had just been warned about and managed to walk barefooted right over it. I ran to my mother, or rather, hobbled to her, and do you know the first thing she did? She sat me on the edge of the tub and had me stick my foot under the cold water running from the tap. That wound needed some more significant doctoring and a good deal of time to mend, but the healing started right there at that flowing water.

The waters of baptism (pour) are also healing waters, waters to treat wounded souls; waters that help wash away the pain, the grief, and the regret of the past so that healing begins. Baptism means that we experience salvation – literally, that we are healed, that we are made whole.

When I was fifteen or sixteen, (pour) our family traveled to the north-west corner of Arizona to visit Lake Mead and the mighty Hoover Dam. What I remember best about our visit was watching the huge plumes of water that gushed from the downstream side of the dam as the guide explained that the water that passed through the dam drove great turbines that generated even most of the electricity that we used in Phoenix, hundreds of miles away.

The waters of baptism (pour) are also powerful and empowering waters. As I’ve told you before, Baptism is not an ending, a done deal, take the dip and forget about it. Baptism is a new *beginning*. Baptism calls the Holy Spirit to flow in us like a mighty river, stirring our hearts and generating energy so that we can live this new life we have been given in Christ, so that we can continue Christ’s own work in the world.

It’s important to remember one more thing about water. (squirt the congregation with a squirt bottle) Whether fishing or playing or swimming or sightseeing, water is surprising and exciting and... well, (squirt) fun.

Make no mistake, Baptism is serious business. Here (pour) you will lose your life at the same time you find it. Here (pour) you will be cleansed from every speck of the broken world. Here (pour) you will become a member of a royal family. Here (pour) your wounds will be anointed. And here (pour) you will receive the power and the will to do God’s work in the world. Each time we bring another Christian into fellowship with Christ, each time we welcome another soul into the Body of Christ, each time we add another saint to the great cloud of witnesses, we are called to remember the resurrection, the cleansing, the belonging, the healing, the empowering that we receive in our baptism.

But dear friends, we are also called to remember the absolute gladness, the perfect delight, the utter *joy* that we receive in our baptism. It is not enough, nor is it right, to proclaim that we are Christ’s own forever, and do so with a face and with a voice and with a life that makes that look like some sort of sentence. We must remember what a wonderful *privilege* it is that we can follow Christ in his Baptism. We must remember what a profound *comfort* it is to be recognized by the Father as his well-beloved sons and daughters. We must remember what an overwhelming *joy* it is to be able to serve our glorious risen Lord. And then we must remember to live like it!

Don’t make me use this thing again!