



Sunday, October 22, 2017

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON & THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Holy Water

INTRODUCTION

Today is a special day at TriCon Church because, in a few minutes, we are welcoming a new life into the Christian Church through the Sacrament of Baptism. And while that is reason enough for celebration, it's *extra special* today because we are Worshiping Together. I can't tell you how thrilling this is to be the one who gets to anoint his head with pure holy water and mark him for eternity as God's beloved.

You know, in our denomination, The United Church of Christ, we do not teach that baptism is *necessary* for salvation. In the UCC we don't baptize babies because we believe they *need* to be baptized. Baptism for us is more like an immersion into the gentle flow of a crystal clear, deep wide river, The River Of Life. A river flowing with what Jesus calls "Living Water".¹ And everyone who has encountered Jesus knows that this is a river of forgiveness, a river of grace, a river that sweeps us all up into what we call church. In the Living Water of baptism, we are immersed into the continuous current of complete and total acceptance. So no matter what life's path carves out, this river will always flow through it, and in the end, Living Water MUST empty out into the very center of the Divine Presence.

The act of baptism metaphorically acts the story out. It is a performance of sorts. It's a symbolic re-telling of our story in relationship to God. It can be viewed as a re-creation of THE Creation story itself. You see this *Living Water* that Jesus speaks of originated in the very beginning of all things and flows through all history until the final triumphant victory when perfect Love will make all things new.

So on the occasion of this Baptism, Zander and Lindy Kessler will retell Creation's story from Scriptures found in Genesis and the Gospel of John. Here, in this sacred moment and *every* existing moment, we live between memory of what has been and hope for what will be. As Norman Maclean wrote, "Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it."²

Hear the Word of the Lord...

¹ Jn 7:38

² Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*

Voice 1: Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the 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.

Voice 2: John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

Voice 1: Genesis 1:3-2

³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Voice 2: John 1:1-5

What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

Voice 1: Genesis 1:9-10

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Voice 2: John 1:9-10, 12-13

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

Voice 1: Genesis 2:4-7

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed the human from the dust of the ground, and breathed into the human's nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being.

Voice 2: John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.

This is the Word of God, for the people of God.

This is our story, the BIG story of God *speaking* creation into existence. God *spoke* and the fuse was ignited. The very word spoken by God launched the epic big-bang. It is like God's heart exploded with Love, giving birth to the cosmos and all there is, was, and ever will be. This is the eternal, circular story of birth, life, death, and rebirth, over and over again. This is the story that we baptize young Luke & Cody into today, with the waters of baptism that echo the vast, deep, primal River Of Life, that on-going adventure that is the endless flow of being. Did you know that every drop of water that existed at the dawn of creation is still on the planet? Water is continually recycled. That's so cool because it means that a dinosaur may have once drunk this very water, or maybe this water helped cool the hot lava from the exploding volcanoes that formed Hawaii, or were part of the great flood during Noah's wild adventure. Water is an elegant symbol of God's never ending cycle of love and recreation. To me, all water is holy water.

In water Baptism we celebrate God's creation of human life. Baptism celebrates the very beginning and the ongoing, miraculous wonder of birth. **Worshipping together**, we joyfully receive this new life, enfolding him into our family, promising to nurture and support him. We want to fill his heart and mind with this magnificent story. So we baptize new life with holy water, bringing them along with us into this creation story of Love gone wild.

You know what else is wild? Christ was there in the beginning as the waters were formed. Before he walked the earth as Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus was this *Word* of God that spoke all things into being, God; creator of the cosmos became human just like all of us. The One who ordered the stars aligned and gave shape and meaning to life, chose to become flesh, and chose to come through the holy embryonic waters of birth. Born of a frightened, scandalized and homeless teenager.

The Word of God became flesh and told bewildering fables and amazing stories about God's extravagant, far reaching love, teaching us that true love is never

conditional on how good or perfect your life is and he taught us that it did not even matter how much you've screwed up, squandered or sinned, because God sees way beyond our mistakes.

The Word became flesh and backed up his teaching with example. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, and dispensed forgiveness with abandon. He offered anyone and everyone who was thirsty the Living Water of Life - no questions asked.

Jesus shows us clearly what being born of water and spirit looks like so that we might gain the courage to dive deeply into this River Of Life and be swept up in its current and follow in the way of the Word made Flesh so that **we** might become the Flesh made Word.

So here we stand, between this memory and hope, re-creating it with this holy water and the Holy Spirit of our Living God.

Ultimately, I think that baptism is really God's action upon us. This simple and gentle act of anointing a new life with this blessed, holy water is the sacred ritual that repeats what God has already spoken into existence at the beginning of time. "You are my beloved, and I am with you completely, in and through each and every beginning, ending and every stage of being in-between." From 9 seconds old to 90+ years and beyond. Named or not, worshiped or not, believer or not, there is no distance or length of time that can separate you from this sacred creation. In the end, baptism is all about God's relentless insistence that we belong in the story. It is here that we remember - it is here at the baptismal font that we claim our hope.

So let us begin this sacred Sacrament, and as we do, let us remember our own baptism and God's claim on us. God take me to the water.