

Come, Word of God; write Your word on our hearts, that we may become your word to the world. Amen.

I am privileged to live by the water, to see the sun rise and set on it, to watch the waves and patterns and birds flying around it... It's a huge blessing. But as a follower of Christ, I am called to live in the water.

Water is such a theme in the Bible because it is so rich with symbols.

Cleansing, bathing, refreshing, drowning, irrigating, renewing, supporting...

These are all functions of water, and also metaphors for baptismal water: cleansing, bathing, refreshing, drowning, irrigating, renewing, supporting.

In the early church people didn't get just get sprinkled – they walked into a font or a river and were completely submerged in it, dunked three times, a powerful visual of the death and resurrection at the heart of baptism.

We die and are reborn in this water – as the purely human nature dies and the new person of the spirit rises, now and forever united with Christ's life.

Jesus takes up residence in us – and so we're never alone.

And all that power and peace and presence is right here, always available to us.

That's what will be happening to Bill in a few minutes.

We find new life with Jesus in the water. We need to get into the water.

Now some of us are baptized on the faith of others and eventually come to faith on our own. Some of us come to faith and then are baptized.

Either way, once for all does the job for all time, cause it's God's work.

Once with water and the three-fold name of the Trinity, and it's done.

And whether you were sprinkled, toe-dipped, dunked or half-drowned, you got the whole thing.

You went down and were laid in the watery tomb with Christ.

You got up and were raised to life eternal with Christ.

You were baptized in the waters of life for ever and ever! Amen!

So do you feel it? Are you living in the water? Most of us were baptized as babies.

Are we aware of living in the water? The Christian life can be like sitting by a river – you can sit on the bank, dipping the occasional toe in, watching people in the water who seem to be having fun – wondering what kind of experiences you

might have if you were to get all the way in – or you can jump in and get wet.

Is there anyone whose faith you admire? Jump in and join them!

Just as Jesus had to go to the Jordan and get wet in order for the fullness of his mission to begin, so we have to come back to the river and get wet, and learn to live “wet,” following the mission God has given each of us. This water life, this life in the water of God’s love and God’s life is where the deepest riches are to be found, richer by far than most of what takes up our time and attention. This water life is where we will spend eternity. This water life is not without pain and grief and questions, Lord knows, but it’s also the place of the deepest joy and greatest love your heart can know.

What we find when we get into the water of God is relationship, ultimate relationship. That’s what Jesus found there – his identity as Son to God the Father. That’s what we find as we give ourselves to exploring this relationship, not from the banks but from the middle of the gorgeous, swirling, frightening, life-giving river of God. Living in the water is anything that brings us closer into relationship with God. Anything that moves us deeper into knowing God and feeling God knowing us, that moves God from the sidelines of our life into the center.

I’m talking about intimacy, not a polite distance once a week, but being real before God. I’m talking about spiritual growth, about finding out who you really are and what you’re really gifted at and what ministry brings you joy. I’m talking about developing a life of prayer, regular, two-way communication. I’m talking about knowing the Bible as a love letter written to you – a very complicated, messy love letter, but full of life. I’m talking about getting together with other Christians on a regular basis to support each other with growing a life of prayer and Bible study and ministry. I’m talking about anything that brings us closer in relationship with God.

Now, we make an audacious claim about what happens in Christian baptism: We claim that in that moment, we are united with Christ, so that a new creation comes into being. A new Bill + Jesus. A new person. We become one with Jesus. I once heard a story about the Great Blondin, who made numerous tightrope walks across Niagara Falls – he walked, he ran, he pushed a wheelbarrow; once he even stopped in the middle and made an omelet. His greatest stunt, in 1859, was to carry his manager across on his back. He crossed the falls to great cheers, and when he got to one side he said, “Do you believe that I could get back over with someone on my back?”

“Yes!” the crowd roared. “Who’s going to come with me?”

They set off, Blondin carrying the man on his back. At mid-point the rope began to sway treacherously, and they were in danger of falling.

As I heard the story, Blondin said to the man,

“From here on, we are one person. If I move my right arm, you move your right arm. If I move my left leg, you move your left leg. If I lean to one side, you lean with me. If you do your own thing, we’ll both die.”

And they did get across to tell the tale.

Friends, that’s the kind of unity we are invited to experience with Jesus, to allow His life to expand in us so that we move with him, not our own way.

We gradually learn to notice when it’s our own move, our old responses of anxiety or anger or despair, and then we can stop and ask

“How would you have me respond?”

It’s always our choice, but Jesus means business.

Jesus wants to live in and through us, to transform the world through us.

As we experience that unity in baptism, what’s true for Jesus becomes true for us.

We go into the water, are symbolically drowned, the “old person” dying in us.

We come up out of the water raised with Him to new life.

We are anointed with His Holy Spirit – and we hear the voice of the Father,

singing love over us, into us: “You are my beloved. With you I am well pleased.”

Before we do anything, God already says, “I love you. I am delighted with you.”

All the action in baptism comes from God.

God looked at you and said, “It is good! Here is my blessing and promise.”

What it means to live in our baptism is to carry that moment always,

no matter what happens, no matter other voices come along to crowd out

that first voice of our creator. “You are my beloved. I am delighted with you.”

As we truly take that in, we can start sharing that delight with a world of people

who do not know they are beloved, or delighted in.

Sharing that good news is our number one mission.

Amen.

Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Isaiah 42:1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;
 a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
 he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth;
 and the coastlands wait for his teaching.
Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out,
 who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
 who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:
I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept
you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,
 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
 from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare;
 before they spring forth, I tell you of them.