

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
Sermon for Sunday, July 26, 2009
Rev. Daniel Burhop, Vacancy Pastor

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Water has been all over the service this morning. From the moment we started, actually. In the Psalm, we prayed, "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever. To Him Who spread out the earth, above the waters; for His steadfast love endures forever."

Giving thanks to the God of creation, the One who created the waters in the first place, as the Spirit hovered over top of the waters, bringing life into this world. If we had kept on in that Psalm and continued reading in it, we would hear of the Red Sea and how Israel passed through the Red Sea and then Pharaoh and his army were drowned in that very same sea.

In the Old Testament lesson, we read about God's promise after the Flood, after He had destroyed all of the things that were living on the earth, except for what was in the ark. And we read of the promise that that would never happen again.

And then in the Gospel, we see Jesus walking on stormy, raging waters, and then calming the storm. We've seen what God does with water from the moment we started today. We just sang, "Praise the One who breaks the darkness with a liberating light. Praise the One who frees the prisoners, turning blindness into sight. Praise the One who preached the Gospel, healing every dread disease; calming storms and feeding thousands with the very bread of peace."

We've seen what God does with water. And actually, it hasn't just been about water but it's been about God's manipulation and His mastery over that water that He created; what He does with that water, and how that water does what He commands. Which is really amazing!

Water is an incredibly powerful thing. Floods are one of the hardest things to prevent and to prepare yourself for. Even if it's the flooding of a basement, you know how much damage water can do to your precious belongings. The flood of a basement is just the start when you get to other floods, like the flood in New Orleans a few years ago. And in North Dakota and in Iowa. And wherever there is land, basically, there's almost this threat of flooding and what water can really do. Water does bring life, and we give thanks to God for the rain that comes down and the green grass that grows. But an overabundance of it causes death. To the point of the flood in the Old Testament, when God floods the entire world, bringing waters up above even the tallest of the mountains, killing everything...except for Noah and those who were in the ark.

Water is a scary thing, when you really think about it and what it can do to you. The disciples on the sea in today's text; that storm that comes up where they're struggling for hours and hours, and really this should've been just a short little trip. A short, little, hour's boat ride to the other side where they're going. But instead there's this headwind that they're battling. These are disciples, some of them are fishermen - they know how to deal inside of a boat. But they're overcome by this huge storm that comes up, and they can't do anything in this water. They can't get to the other side. They can't protect themselves. Water's a scary thing.

What's even scarier about the Gospel reading is that, if you really read the text closely, Jesus is the one who sends them into this storm. Jesus tells them to get into the boat - and He stays on shore. He tells them to go off into the sea. And this storm comes up. Jesus is the one who sends them into this storm that's going to rock their boat and scare the lives out of them. And Jesus sees this from the top of the mountain where He goes to pray. And He goes down and He goes out to them, walking on water. And I always wonder what this looks like - it's not simply like walking on the Reflecting Pool at the Lincoln Memorial. But in the midst of a storm and waves that are crashing, Jesus is walking *on top* of this.

And He goes out to them, and what you would expect is that Jesus would go to them in the boat and protect them and say, "See, this is who I am, I can do all of these wonderful things. I am God, you are not. Listen to me."

But what He means to do is to pass by them, when you read the text. He looks out and He sees their struggle, and He walks out onto the water. And He means to go *by* them. And they look out and they see Him going by them, and they don't think it's Jesus, for one thing. What they think it is is that it's a ghost that, you know that maybe it's one of those ghosts of the water, coming up to get them that all seamen worry about and dread. But it's not a ghost. Those aren't there. They don't exist. It's Jesus. And He turns to them as they're frightened and He says, "Do not fear, it is I." And He gets into the boat with them, and the waters calm.

What an amazing story that is! In the midst of all these waves and the power of the water around them, Jesus first walking *over* it and then jumping into the boat with them; Climbing in in the midst of this storm. And then the storm ceases. And they go to the other side.

What a wonderful teaching miracle this is that Jesus performs for His disciples, teaching them who He is; teaching them about themselves as well. He is true God. The Spirit that hovered over the waters at creation - now Jesus walks on those waters. God is the one who stopped the flood and made the waters recede, and here Jesus is the one who stops the storm and calms it.

Jesus is God. He is there to be with them. He is there in human flesh, true God and true Man. And what a lesson that is for them, who still don't understand who He is. They still don't even understand about the bread and the fish and all that had just happened

that same day. And He shows them who He is. He is the God that loves them. He is the God who has been there since the beginning, when the waters were created. He is the God that has control over those waters, and can stop the storm in an instant - who doesn't even need to stop the storm but who can walk on top of those raging waters. He's the same God that loves them so much that He stops the flood and puts a rainbow in the sky, promising never to bring that kind of harm to them again.

What's really neat about the rainbow, is that the same Hebrew word for "bow", for the bow in the sky, is the same word as the weapon. Everywhere else it's used in the Old Testament, it's the weapon of the bow that brings destruction. Here God places that weapon, that bow, in the sky as a reminder that he will not bring that again. At least until the Cross.

And that's where Jesus shows who He truly is. He is true God, He is true Man. And on the Cross, He takes all of that anger that God has towards sinful man - towards you and me, for every sin that we've committed. And He puts it on Christ.

God hasn't stopped bringing floods and destroying the world on our account because of our goodness, because we're better than the people who were there before the flood at all. It's just now that that wrath, that anger, that flood comes down upon Christ on the Cross. The one who takes all of our sin, all of our evilness...and becomes it on the cross, and is punished. God promises never again that all flesh shall be cut off by the waters of the flood. Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth - because instead, that flood and that anger destroys Jesus on the Cross.

And that death still impacts us today, because that same flood that came upon Christ on the Cross comes upon you in your baptism. As everything that Jesus is is united to you, as you are buried with Him, as you are crucified with Him, as you die with Him, and as you are raised with Him. In your baptisms you now put on Christ, as we're going to sing in a few minutes here.

The flood is just something that even points and teaches more about baptism than anything, as Peter writes. "God's patience waited in the days of Noah when the ark was being prepared in which a few, that is 8 people, were brought safely through the water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you. Not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

God's patience now comes to us because we have been forgiven. He promises never to destroy us because we have that promise of Baptism, that promise of forgiveness in Christ. Because in Baptism, He *does* destroy our sinful nature. "Do you not know," Paul writes, "that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too, might walk in newness of life."

Water has been everywhere in our service today. It started at the very beginning, when we made that beginning in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and we remember our baptisms. That's why we can come here into the presence of God, because He has forgiven us. All of our evilness is washed away, immersed and drowned forever. The water of your Baptism day restored again whatever old Adam and his sin destroyed, and all of our sinful selves employed according to our nature. That's what we're going to sing in a few minutes, you can pay attention to the words more then. Wonderful words in this hymn that we're going to sing about baptism and what that gives to us.

It gives us Christ. It gives us Jesus. It gives us forgiveness. You are Baptized, you are clothed with Christ. Clothed with the one that can walk on water, clothed with one that goes to the Cross. Clothed and united to His life, to His suffering, to His death, and to His resurrection.

And that's why we live the way we do. In baptism, we put on Christ and all that He is. Even the suffering. We go through storms that sometimes maybe even God sends us into. But in all those storms, we remember that we have forgiveness. We have the promise of salvation. We have the promise of the rainbow.

The Apostle John had been through storms of life, and he's exiled on the island of Patmos when he writes about this vision, and he says, "After this, I looked and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the Spirit and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with One seated on the throne. And He who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

The promise of the rainbow is a promise that extends not just to this earth, but to heaven. That's where everything points. To the promise that everything that we have in salvation, that even though we're sinful and that we deserve a flood to come upon us and kill us, that flood comes in our Baptism. It drowns out all of our sin. It buries us with Christ, and it raises us again on the last day. And it gives us that promise of heaven, and we get to be there and see that throne and be surrounded by the angels and all the company of heaven, singing glory to God. That's what gives us peace.

And now may this peace of God which surpasses all of our understanding, may it keep our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.