

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera Qld

14th January 2024 – Baptism of Jesus

Mark 1:9-15

WATER AND THE WORD – LOVE AND LIFE

Water. What do you think about it? What do you know about it? What feelings does it give you? We know that it is a compound, made up of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, H₂O, and that it is essential to all life on this planet. We know that it comes in three states, solid, liquid, and gas, and that our system of measuring temperature is based on it: 0 degrees is when water becomes solid, ice, and 100 degrees is when it becomes gas, steam. It makes up 55-60% of our human body, although don't think that cutting back on drinking water is a good way to lose weight, because as a rule of thumb while we can go 3 weeks without food, we can only survive 3 days without water. It is so essential to our existence that every thing we do as people from where we build our cities, to where and how we grow our food, to the activities and lifestyle we undertake as individuals, families, and groups, all revolves around the availability of water. Water is life, in a physical sense more than anything else on this planet.

While we are often reminded of the absolute necessity of water when we see the effects of drought, on the other side, we see the death and destruction which too much water causes also. This water that comes in floods, and regularly by its force takes lives, and causes damage and devastation. Normally in Australia at this time of year we see floods in the northern half from an oversupply of water, and lack of water in the southern half which brings either drought or bushfires. Right now, strangely, we are experiencing floods in both the north and the south. Water is life, but sadly sometimes this precious resource which we might long for can also come in overabundance and bring death.

Water has so many different uses for us, and often is joined to something else in order to do what we want it to do. An example of that is what we are observing today, the Baptism of Jesus. What happens here isn't the same as what happens for us in Baptism, but it's a precursor to it. The act of baptising which John and some others practiced at this time was a ritual washing; an act people could be a part of to show they were sorry for their sins and now wanted to follow God. But that was it. In Jesus' case it was unusual because the voice of the Father was heard declaring Jesus to be His Son, and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove. The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, was there in this Baptism. But otherwise, it remained unchanged for everyone else.

When did Baptism change to the earthly act with a heavenly meaning we have today? When God's Word was added to the water. That same Word of God which we heard in our first reading today created the world and everything in it, that Word also gave Baptism new meaning, and power and presence in our lives. God's Word with the water changed what Baptism is, what it does, and what it means for us. Martin Luther explains it very well for us in the Small Catechism, where he writes; 'Baptism is not just water used on its own. It is water used together with God's word, in the way God has commanded.' That began when in the last words of Jesus to His disciples in Matthew's Gospel He said, 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' (*Matthew 28:19 CEV*) And just 10 days after that, on the day of Pentecost, the lives of Jesus' followers were changed as the Holy Spirit came to them, and they baptised over 3,000 people who were also transformed by the Holy Spirit. And from that point on, we, God's people, combining ordinary water and the power of God's Word, have also carried out this Baptism in the way Jesus commanded; by the power of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, washing away the sin which separates us from God, and bringing people into His family and joining them to the love He has for us all.

What does Baptism do? Again, let's go first to Luther in the Small Catechism; 'We don't get God's gifts in baptism just by using water. We get them by using God's Word with the water and by believing what God says. If we use water on its own without God's Word, that's not baptism. But

when we use God's word with the water, the Holy Spirit shows God's love for us by washing us clean from sin and giving us new life.' What do we receive in our Baptism? As we are washed clean we receive new birth, a fresh beginning, being brought back to God and given the gift of eternal life. Earlier we talked a bit about how water in our world is necessary for life, but sometimes also brings death. That also happens in our Baptism. In Romans 6 we read, 'Don't you know that all who share in Christ Jesus by being baptised also share in his death? When we were baptised, we died and were buried with Christ. We were baptised, so we would live a new life, as Christ was raised to life by the glory of God the Father.' (*Romans 6:3-4 CEV*) If those words sound familiar to you, they are a part of what is said in a funeral service, a time when we look for the hope and promise of new life. When we were baptised, we died and were buried with Christ. We were baptised, so we would live a new life, as Christ was raised to life by the glory of God the Father. Our Baptism, no matter when it was, no matter how old we were, no matter if we remember it or not, it joins us to both the death and resurrection of Jesus; it gives us new life. That is what that simple act of washing with water, combined with the Word of the Triune God who created the universe, does for us.

And what then does Baptism mean for us today? What's the significance of this event which most of us can't even remember for ourselves? Through the water and the Word, we have the love and life which God promises to all His people. It is our promise. It is our guarantee. Martin Luther with all the hard times he went through as He struggled against might and power Catholic Church of his time, with people turning against him and often facing a death sentence if he could be arrested, he would say, 'but I am baptised!' That was his absolute, over everything, guarantee and promise which carried him through his own failings, doubts, and weaknesses, and reminded Him that he was God's child, joined to Jesus' death and life in his baptism. His baptism reminded him that through water and the Word, the love and life God's promises were truly his.

And it's no coincidence that in several of the Gospels as soon as Jesus is baptised, He goes out in the desert for 40 days and is tempted by the devil. The devil loves to attack those who are with God, he works even harder then, and it was to be able to stand against these attacks that the Father

gave Jesus that Word of love and the presence of the Holy Spirit in His baptism. And how was Jesus tempted? In the longer versions in other Gospels we are told that He was tempted to only worry about Himself, look after His own needs first, seek pleasure for Himself rather than serve God, to not follow God and God's plan for Him. Mmm, sounds a little bit too familiar, doesn't it? Very similar to the temptations we face in our lives; please ourselves, ignore God and His will for us, put ourselves ahead of others. But where Jesus was able to say 'no' to all the temptations He faced, we often fail. Here again is what our baptism means for us in our lives today. Again, in our failures, in our falling, in our weaknesses, our Baptism joins us, every day, to the death and new life of Jesus, enabling us to be washed and forgiven by God and to set out on that road of following and serving Him again. What does our Baptism mean to us? It means that we know we can live each day in the love and the life which are ours in Jesus.

Water. The Word. Put them together they make Baptism; where earth meets heaven. It's where in the struggles, the failings, the weaknesses of our lives, we are joined to the love God shows to us in Jesus, and the new life which is ours through His dying and rising again. Not just a one-off act which happened perhaps long ago, but a bond with God, an eternal relationship, which opens to us His love and blessings both in this life and beyond. Amen.

FOR FUTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Think about the roles water plays in your life, perhaps many of these ways are things you don't even think of. If you only had enough water for drinking, which is necessary for survival, how would your life be different, what could you no longer do?
- Think about your Baptism? If you can't remember it have you been told anything about it, or seen any pictures? Is there someone you can ask about this day and what happened then?
- How often do you think about your Baptism day-to-day? Are there times when remembering that you are baptised gives you comfort, or strength? How can God's promises of love and life through our Baptism help us in what we face and go through each day?

Pray: thank God for putting water and His Word together in Baptism to join us to Jesus' dying and rising again, and the love and new life which are now ours through this. Ask God to help us to remember and live in the promises of our Baptism each day.

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