

Ever feel defeated? Like your circumstances are stacked against you, like you're in way over your head? Well, you're in good company. God's people have found themselves in just such situations time and again. Each of the Scripture passages we've read this evening are stories of God's divine deliverance when things looked bleak and hopeless, but better things were yet to come. In each of those stories, you may have noticed, water is a central image and metaphor, pointing toward God's faithfulness. And in each, through water, God claims what is already God's own.

According to Genesis 1, at the beginning of creation, (I love the imagery of this phrase) God's spirit blew over the face of the waters; as we move forward, water served as an agent of both destruction and redemption as Noah's ark 'floated on the face of the waters.' Again, destruction and redemption merge as one in the waters of the Red Sea, when the Hebrew people escape from their oppressors.

We see this motif throughout the Scriptures: water represents the moral chaos from which Jonah finds refuge when he finds himself in the belly of a large fish; it bathes Jesus as he is divinely named as God's Son as he begins his public ministry. Water is the material substance with which Jesus performs his first miracle at the wedding at Cana; Jesus walks on it to encourage Peter to trust him. Water is a metaphor for the turmoil we experience in our lives when storms rise up and threaten to overtake us as it did when the disciples were in the boat. Water ... *holy water* flows from Jesus' eyes as he grieves the death of his dear friend; Jesus uses a basin full of it to represent his devotion and service and forgiveness and radical love in the upper room at the last supper... Though each of these episodes, we see God's faithfulness, God's creative, life-giving activity, and God claiming what God has created.

One of my favorite things is to sit by the water up in the mountains of WNC – dangling my fingers in the trickles of a stream, feeling the cool spray at the foot of a waterfall, listening to the soft lap of water against the hull of a small sailboat on a mountain lake.

I grew up on the water. My Saturdays and Sundays as a child were spent at the lake on Hobie Cats, Sunfish, Windsurfers. My dad loved boating and made a

living teaching people how to sail on a tiny little lake in Asheville. He drilled into me at a very early age that my job was to stay *on* the water, never *in* the water.

Sound advice for someone who has never been a strong swimmer, and to this day, I still get anxious and panicky whenever I'm in water more than about 3 feet deep. I have a 'thing' about needing to see **and feel** the bottom, about having my head (particularly my ears) out of the water, and about knowing exactly how far away from dry ground I am.

Not too long ago, I was reminded of a terrifying moment when I was a child, maybe 7 or 8 years old. I can't think of where I was, but I remember being with my best friend at a wave pool the summer after I passed my beginners swimming lessons. In my memory, the waves were huge! My friend was laughing, bobbing up and down as the waves passed. I (on the other hand) was flailing, not able to time my breaths between the swells of the waves when my feet momentarily touched the bottom. With each crest, I was overwhelmed, increasingly disoriented, and absolutely terrified. I was eventually yanked out of the pool by an adult, unable to catch my breath. After a little while, the man said, "you're ok, kid. It can be overwhelming. You're ok."

The power of water: so glorious in its beauty, yet so terrifying in its potential.

Fast forward to when I was 16: another adventure with water, and I was really nervous, scared even. With my feet firmly planted beneath me, I bent forward and stared, hit with the comforting realization that I could see the bottom. (You could say my face was upon the water.) A pitcher-full had just been poured in, rather messily, I thought, with lots of theatrical splashing and sloshing. But I wondered if this water could possibly hold the same tremendous power that I had previously experienced ~ the power of life and death. It was clear and cool, untainted by chlorine. There was no joyful laughter and no one was boisterously bobbing up and down. Just me and a bowl of water. My priest's words were reverberating in my mind: "in the water of baptism, we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit." With his hand, he created a wave of water that washed over my forehead. I stood up, and as the drops ran down my face, I took a long, deep, delicious breath, just as I did on the edge of the pool, and I suppose just as I did the day my mother birthed me.

A moment later, with my eyes still closed, overpowered by what was taking place, his finger traced the form of a cross on my forehead, and he gave voice to God's

claim on me: I was Christ's own. Forever. Again, I remembered what that man had told me: "you're ok, kid. It can be overwhelming. You're ok."

From the very beginning, our narrative, our story as God's people, is sprinkled with powerful images and metaphors pertaining to water.

We tell these stories to remind us **who** we are, **whose** we are and **how** we have come to be. *Each story* is a reminder of the identity of God's people. *Each story* is a testament to the enduring and faithful love of God. *Each story* is another invitation to take *our* place (once again) in the good work of God in the world. Each story drives home the reality that God desires that we be claimed ~ claimed by and for radical love.

At our baptisms, we were immersed in not just water, but in the sacred stories of God's love for God's people as well. "The early church [has] compared the waters of baptism to the waters of creation, the water from the rock at Horeb for which the wandering Israelites thirsted, the water in which Naaman was immersed and healed, the water of Mary's womb, the living water promised to the woman at the well in Samaria [and] the healing pool of Bethsaida, the water from the side of Christ, and the waters of Paradise."¹ As the love and grace, peace and mercy of God transform us in the baptismal waters, we are made part of the story of what God has done *and is doing* in the world. And in our reaffirmation of Baptismal Covenant, we tell the story again ... we profess it again ... thereby binding ourselves to it - again.

In the more difficult parts of this story, we try to discern words of life, however faint they may sound. And in the overtly redemptive parts, we wonder how we, too, with all our faults, could be among those who find favor with God.

Paul says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

And therein lies our hope: we are children of the **living God**, claimed as **Christ's own**. Forever. That is the Easter miracle that is laid bare before us, for us to claim even as Christ claims us.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

¹ Adapted from Marion Hatchett, *Commentary on the Prayer Book*, p 253.