

Wednesday in Advent 1 12/2/20
St. Matthew 28:16-20
Sacrament of Baptism, First Part

In the beginning, God created. In six 24-hour-days, God created all things, out of nothing, simply by His word. “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Ge 1:3). “And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters’ ... and it was so” (Ge 1:6,7). And so it went through all six days of creation. God spoke, and He created simply by His Word.

Once, Jesus spent a long day teaching the people and they were pressing in on Him and His disciples. So, they left the crowd, got into a boat, and sailed for the other side of the lake. But, there little pleasure cruise proved to be anything but a pleasure, because they were not long under way when “a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat,” so the disciples were afraid (Mk 4:37). And Jesus -- Jesus was sound asleep, not in the least bit afraid of His own creation. The disciples woke Him up and cried out to Him in their fear and distress to save them. So, God in the flesh, spoke, “Peace! Be still!” And immediately, instantly, “the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mk 4:39). God spoke, and the upheaval in nature was stilled – immediately.

Once, Jesus went to Bethany because His friend Lazarus was ill. But by the time He made it to Bethany, His friend was four days in the grave. With Lazarus’ sisters Mary and Martha, Jesus went to the tomb where he was buried. God in the flesh ordered the stone be removed from the tomb and spoke, “Lazarus, come out” (Jn 11:43). The man who had died came out, alive. God spoke, and the dead man lived.

Dear Friends in Christ, the focus of our Midweek Advent worship will be the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Tonight, we begin with the First Part,

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word.

Baptism is washing with water. But, it is not just a washing of water, the outward removing of dirt and grime with water. It is a blessed washing of new life. That is because our Lord Christ joined His Word to that water. The power of the Word of God -- that created all things out of nothing in six days; that stilled the wind and the waves; that raised Lazarus from the grave -- the power of that Word is added in, with, and under the water

It is good for us to remember and cherish that, Dear Friends, because God does His work through His Word. Baptism is not a work of man; it is a work of God as He unites His all-powerful, all-creating Word to the water. God works through the water and the Word of Baptism to bring us into Christ, making us one with Him in death and in life, and bring us into His Church, that we may be a little lamb of the Good Shepherd's flock.

Think of Noah's ark. God knew the wind and the waves were coming, so He instructed Noah to build that ark. Then, God shut Noah, his family, and the animals into that ark to save them from the wind and the waves.

God brought you into Christ and shut you into Christ that you may be kept safe from the wind and waves of this present age.

I happen to be a fan of the University of Iowa Hawkeyes [Go Hawks!]. You don't have to be a Hawkeye fan or a sports fan to know of "the wave" that is done at Iowa home football games. The University of Iowa children's hospital was built directly across the street from the University's football stadium. Here's the part of it that makes me emotional -- the designers of the hospital purposely built it high enough with a large viewing

window so that the hospitalized children could be taken to the upper floors so they and their families could watch the football games. And, at the end of the first quarter, the fans in the stadium turn towards the children's hospital and wave at the children. Hence, what I think is one the best traditions not just in sports, but in all of humanity. For perhaps even one, brief moment those children are offered a reprieve from their illness. And, "the wave," the wave is your neighbor's way of saying we're here. We're here.

When you are forced to sail into the hospital room to see your child lying on the hospital bed; when you've had to sail into the doctor's office; or the lawyer's office because your spouse who once spoke the words "I do," now doesn't and divorce papers await your signature; when you sail home at the end of a long day to see your spouse from whom you departed that morning in a shouting match; when you've sailed into your quiet lonely home after your spouse's funeral; remember and be cheered that by your baptism into Christ, you are shut up into Christ Jesus. And just as that ark preserved faithful Noah, Christ preserves you from all the wind and the waves of earthly life. Oh, no doubt, those waves will upend you, the cold rain will beat upon you, that wind will drive you to the brink of despair, but remember Christ. He's there. He's with you, He's for you. In the waters, of your Baptism, He has claimed you as His own child, and not even death itself can take you from Him.

Its like the Psalmist says, "The LORD will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore" (121:7-8). You're "going out," you're "coming in" that means all the days and steps and breaths of your Christian life.

Your life mirrors the Israelites in the Old Testament. They were enslaved in the land of death. So, God led through to freedom through the Red Sea waters, and then led them into the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. But you will recall, there is the rest of the story. They did not walk through the Red Sea waters into the Promised Land. No, they sinned by worshipping the golden calf, and so they had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, before entering the Promised Land. Yet, you also will recall that, from His own hand, God fed them with manna from heaven. Their clothes did not wear out and their sandals did not wear out from their wandering (cf. De 29:5). Even in their wilderness wanderings, God was faithful and God kept them

So it is for you, Dear Child of God. You have been delivered from death in the waters of your Baptism. Your entrance into the Promised Land of heaven is sure and certain in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today, this day, you find yourself wandering in the wilderness of Covid, cancer, loneliness, depression, fear, and regret. But God is faithful for you just as much as He was faithful to the Israelites. The LORD will deliver you from the evil one. "He will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore". Until that day that He brings you to the Promised Land of heaven.

God has joined His Word of promise to the water so that baptism is a life-giving water. Remember your baptism and delight in it, for your baptism means that you are God's own child.