

Pastor Troy E. Medlin
Lent 3, Wednesday
Grace, River Forest
3/15/22

Saving Waters

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

I often think there is deep truth being communicated when an infant seems to be unsure of what is happening when we are gathered around that water- as it is about to be poured over them.

Imagine a sign near the baptismal font that says something like *Enter at your own risk. Or Not Safe. Be welcomed, but warned* too. Maybe to be more theologically accurate-- *this way to your death--* and to a new life only God can create.

As Pastor Paul Hoffman told the story recently, after a gathering at a Lutheran seminary, some leaders stood near the font at the threshold of the worship space sprinkling folks with water from the font as they were walking back out into the world. While they were liberally sprinkling the assembly, water was pooling up on the floor. This caught the attention of someone who placed a one word sign near the font that read *Danger*.

You could say there is both welcome and warning In this flood of mercy.

You could hear it before you could see it. It gradually became a thunderous roar the closer we got to it. Standing on the rail overlooking Niagara Falls I was struck with awe in its presence. I was overwhelmed. The force of the water and the beauty that it creates took my breath away. The water flows with such force. So much so that you might say it inspires equally both joy and terror.

That is how Ben Stewart, my worship professor talks about the natural world. Creation itself holds what he calls *welcome and warning*. You can marvel at Niagara Falls from a distance, but don't get too close. Don't fall in. It will simply sweep you away in its tide.

Ben says, "Deeply pooled water holds mysteries and dangers: we cannot on our own see into or even approach the hidden depths. The threats in deep water include both drowning and the hungry creatures who make the deep water their home and hunting ground. At the same time, descending bodily into pooled water is often a euphoric experience of well-being."

Around Jacob's well alongside the Samaritan woman Jesus speaks of *Living Water*. Nothing stagnant or tame about the contents of this ancient source of life . This water not only satisfies

our deepest longings but apparently becomes in you and me- a spring of water gushing up into eternal life. There is something generative, creative, powerful, flowing, forward propelling, about this water.

The one who speaks and identifies himself as your living water is the same voice we hear in our creation story. “When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the *waters*. Then God *said*, “Let there be.”

This eternal word- who speaks over the waters has spoken over you, when you were placed in that river of grace. You are my beloved Child. You are forgiven. Christ *lives* in your heart by faith.

This water is a sign of cleansing and rebirth. And Paul’s prayer for you is that in that death and resurrection you may know the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ-- a love that dives down to the very ends of your world and the borderlands of your life. A strong and enduring love that is yours, especially- when our mind, body, spirit, or this world fails you.

That work that is more than we could ever ask or imagine- that Paul tells the Ephesians about? It is Christ’s ultimate act. The miracle of the empty tomb. It is God’s promise that this word causes water to spring up in the deserts where we thought death had taken over long ago. Forgiveness and freedom- created where we have seen shame and captivity move in. Reconciliation that we could never take credit for because bitterness had taken root and grown. Be warned: A tomorrow of God’s making beyond the tombs of your past.

You who are filled with the fullness of this God who is the Nazarean, you now live in this water’s tide. It is not safe there. For you will be spilled out on shores near and far. Called to pour yourself in acts of cruciform love. As so many of you already do.

Working for justice. Bringing mercy. Advocating for peace in the midst of conflict. Walking into places of death and embodying the world to come. Dying to yourself and rising again- following Blessed Mary.

Listen to the words she speaks and then add your voice. Rich sent away empty, hungry filled with good things, lowly lifted up, mighty cast down. Not safe. Yet our faithful God will keep us, provide for us, and be with us through it all. God remembers us and puts us back together all along the way. Others may say to you that your words and deeds have become living water- bringing life to the barren land where they live. You too might be refreshed by water springing up from those you only knew as strangers. What is that like?

You could say that this pool of living water- filling us and bearing us up holds both welcome and warning. These promises, embodied in Christ the word carry us to our death in that font and every death going forward, through every grave, and into Christ's Easter garden.

There is nothing safe about the voice speaking over the waters joined to your broken body. Nothing safe- only saving. For your very flesh and for the life of this whole weary world.