

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Pentecost Sunday

Sacrament of Holy Baptism

“Living Water”

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Hebrew Scripture: Exodus 30:17-21

Christian Scripture: Acts of the Apostles 2:1-4, 36-41

Sunday, 9 June 2019

Pentecost Sunday



The sacrament of Holy Baptism is one of the most beautiful rites in the Christian Church. I am so fortunate to be in this particular church, with this congregation, with these parents and with this beautiful child, Lily. My heart is full this morning.



Logan, Olivier, Lily and I have been planning this day for some time. This baptism is unusual in that it is not an infant who is being baptized, so the font is not completely appropriate.



It is also not an adult who is being baptized, so neither is immersion completely appropriate. We have *a child* who has of her *own volition* asked to be baptized into the Christian faith and who asked to be in covenant with this faith community. So, to baptize Lily, we will pour water over her, recognizing that she is a young soul while also recognizing that she comes to us and offers herself to God of her own free will.

That being said, we did consider immersion baptism. That consideration and the evangelists' preaching yesterday on the street corner reminded me of a story.

Once there was an old intoxicated man wandering through the woods when he came upon a good ol' time Congregationalist minister in the Connecticut River. "Well," the drunk said to himself "I guess to get to the other side of the river, I need to talk to the man standing in

the river”. The drunk man moved closer and the preacher called him in the water. "Sir", he said "do you want to see Jesus?" "Sure!" answered the drunk still believing this was his only way to the other side. "Praise God!" said the preacher and the drunken man entered the river. The preacher took and immersed the man into the water. Raising him up, he ask the drunk, "Did you see Jesus?" "Uh, no" said the drunk. "That is just fine, we will try again." And the preacher dunked the man again, this time holding him a little longer. When raised-up, the preacher asked again, "Did you see Jesus?" "No sir, I still did not," replied the drunk. "That is alright we can try once again." And so the preacher dunked the man once more, this time holding him down until he bubbled. "Did you see Jesus, son?" ask the preacher. The drunk man gasping for breath this time replied, "No, but let me ask you something. Are you sure this where you lost him?"

Perhaps in light of this humor, Lily is pleased not to be immersed in the Connecticut River.



Friends in Christ, today is Pentecost and it is the perfect day to celebrate a baptism. The reason why today is the day to baptize is because this is the birthday of the Christian church. This is the day that the church began.



God, the father and mother, was introduced at the Creation of the Earth.



Jesus, the son, was introduced at his birth in Bethlehem.



And the Holy Spirit was introduced at Pentecost when Peter preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, many were converted, received the Holy Spirit and the church was founded.



Pentecost is about fresh water as much as it is about ‘tongues of fire’. The Holy Spirit, something new, inspired the ancient Hebrew faith. New converts, Gentiles, from varying countries, varying cultures, varying politics, varying ages, varying races, varying languages and varying sexes all came together and gave new life to a faith tradition and sought to establish a new relationship between God and humans.



That is why in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, some three thousand were added to the number that day.



This morning I will pour water over Lily's head. This water, though not the Connecticut River, flows. This is key. For fresh water must flow. It must have a source; it must move and breathe; it must be oxygenated otherwise it cannot sustain life. Water must enter. Water must depart. It is not complex. You all know this. Water that is stagnant cannot sustain life. Water that does not move is fetid.

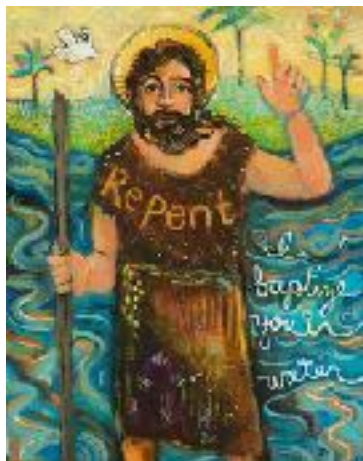


The Dead Sea is dead because there is no outlet for the water. There is no circulation. And where there is no circulation, there is no life. Lily, a young child, is our church's life. Don Webster, though having died approximately one year ago, is our church's life. Without Don having departed, yet still with us in Spirit, there is no fresh water. There is no life without his presence and departure. Without Lily coming to us, and her departure, we have no source of new life. Without Don and Lily, we are dead. Thanks be to God for Don and Lily who enable the fresh flow of the Holy Spirit to circulate throughout this beloved church. By celebrating Lily's life, we celebrate Don's life, for both lives bring us life-giving possibilities.

The roots of Christian baptism have their source in the Hebrew faith. From our reading in Exodus, we learn that the Aaron and his sons, the priests, must ritually wash with water. Why? The refrain in our reading is “lest they die”. “Lest they die”.



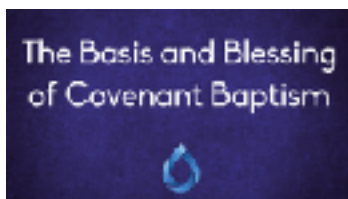
Ritually washing was so important that it was declared, “a rule for all time binding on [Aaron] and his descendants in every generation” (Exodus 30:21).



John the Baptist borrowed from what was an ancient Hebrew practice. The Essences, who with many scholars say John the Baptist and Jesus were associated, tweaked this ritual bathing to symbolize the death of sin and a renewal life.



And the early Christian church tweaked it yet again, and declared it a sign of a covenant, a promise.



Today, the covenant proclaimed in baptism contains many bondings. Today in baptism we bond God and Lily. We bond Lily to her parents and sponsors. We bond Lily and her parents to us, Centre Congregational Church.



Through Lily's baptism, we give thanks for her being 'fresh water' to the Christian faith and to our church. Logan and Olivier, we give you thanks for blessing our church with your children who have meant so much to us. Mathieu and Nikki, we offer to you in faith our daughter, Lily, to nurture and raise in the Christian faith. And last, but certainly not least: God, we thank you for Jesus Christ, the one who best communicated to us your essence, and for the Holy Spirit, given to us at Pentecost for the continual renewal of our faith.

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded, "Amen".