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*Just Water*

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Water is something astonishing to me. How much of it there is on the planet, the vastness of the oceans. Even more so, how vital it is for life. But also, how dangerous it can be, how something so essential for life, can bring the devastation of death. Something that can bring so much joy also causes many people so much fear. If someone does not know how to swim, it can actually pull you down into its depths. But yet, it is what we thirst for, what we require to live.

There is something about water. My whole life I have loved the water; I grew up going to my grandparent's cabin on the lake in northern Minnesota. Waking up to the sounds of loons, and the sun rise glowing off water that resembles a pain of glass. Or on a hot July day, jumping off the dock with my cousins having trick contests that, really only emulated us seeing how many times we could spin before entering the lake. Going tubing behind the boat as my dad ruthlessly finds pleasure in watching his children cling for dear life, as he tries to dump them. I grew up learning how to respect the water, and how to swim, learning boating safety, and the dangers that it brings. But, to me, there are not many days better than a day spent up at my grandparent's cabin. There is nothing more refreshing than jumping into the lake on a hot summer day.

Water in itself does amazing things. But in our scripture readings today, we read about something remarkable that happens not in Northern Minnesota, but on the banks of the Jordan River. There we see this raving, wild man, dressed in clothing made of camel's hair. His name, is John the Baptist, and it is said that he eats grasshoppers and wild honey. He has been calling out to everyone in Judea and Jerusalem to come repent and be baptized with water for the forgiveness of sins. And there on the banks of the Jordan river, comes a man, named Jesus, from the town of Nazareth.

After John baptizes him, the most amazing thing happens. Immediately after Jesus comes up out of the water, the heavens are torn open, they are ripped apart, and the spirit comes upon this man, and we hear the voice of God, and he says "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." This Jesus of Nazareth, is truly God's own son. Jesus has come to the water, to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

It may seem strange, that two weeks ago we were celebrating Christmas, the time of Jesus's birth when he was a baby, we skipped over his childhood, and now here we are, at the beginning of his ministry. I know what you might be thinking... Why in the world is Jesus, the son of God, coming to be baptized, why is he coming to have his sins forgiven? He is not like all those who are there in Jerusalem, he is perfect, he is Jesus! But Jesus, is not just standing on the shores watching all of this take place, but he is in the water, among the crowd. He isn't having his sins forgiven, instead he is coming to participate in their sins, he is coming to begin his mission, his ministry amongst sinners. He comes to the water to become one of them. He comes to the water to become one of us. Jesus comes and puts himself into their sinful condition, into our sinful condition.

By coming to the waters of the Jordan river, Jesus has now united himself to us. In Jesus' baptism, he has received the Holy Spirit upon him, and in the waters of our baptism we inherit that same spirit. The waters of baptism are astonishing, because it is no longer just water, but water and God's word. It is the Word that God spoke to create the foundations of the earth, and it is that same word that recreates us. Just as water is essential for life, yet it brings the devastation of death, so does baptism. Because we need to die to our sin, in order to be raised up again.

In the waters of baptism, the Old Adam, the desire to sin that lives inside every one of us, that disgusting, miserable, wretched sinner, is drowned, it is buried, and it is dead. In the waters of baptism, we put on Christ. It is Christ who said, those "who thirst for righteousness will be filled..." And in the waters of our baptism, we are. Our desire to be righteous, to be perfect... is filled.

It may not always seem that way though, because unlike Jesus, we are sinful people. We all know it. We look back at the past year, and it seems every year we say how bad it was. We see how broken we are. We see pain, suffering, and death. We look around us and find that we are lost, wandering in the desert. Thirsting for a glimpse of hope, and joy. We continuously try to satisfy this need by working hard, doing good things, loving our neighbor, yet we always find ourselves wanting more. We make resolutions on how to live a better life, we read self-help books, about how to live our best life now, and we always end up right back where we were, being dragged down into the depths of our sin. But, just as Paul writes to the Romans, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

I don't know about you, but to me these words are refreshing. These words are refreshing because we know that Jesus has come. We know that he has come into the world, and that he lived a perfect life. He came to be one of us, and he came and died for us. But we know that he was raised up again. He defeated sin, he defeated death, and he has conquered the devil. Jesus has come, and has forgiven us of all our sins. So what does all of this mean for us?

What do we do in those moments of life, when nothing seems to be going our way? What do we do when we are in despair because nothing we ever do is good enough, and sin continues to crush us, as we are pulled down into the abyss? What about life, and all of the problems it brings with us, bills, the stress of work, and family, or whatever else might be going on? Baptism isn't something that is going to solve all of our problems, it might not solve any of them. But our baptism is our hope, because we know that in it, Christ is there in the waters with us. He has come and actually become one of us, and he has forgiven all of us.

Water is truly something astonishing... But, more astonishing is water combined with God's word, his promise to each, and every one of us that he has forgiven us and made us new. The waters of our baptism are not only refreshing for our soul but they are life giving. So as we depart from here this week, I want to give you a challenge. Every single one of us. Wake up each morning, and whether you are taking a shower, brushing your teeth, washing your face, whatever, remember your baptism. Remember God's promises, that Christ got into the water

with you, and has taken his sins upon himself. Remember that in your baptism, you have been united with Christ, and now walk in newness of life. Amen.