

**“Come to the Water”**  
Baptismal Renewal Service  
January 13, 2019  
Pastor Jenothy Irvine

**Part I.**

Movie clip from O Brother Where Art Thou? (baptism scene)

Come on in - the water is fine. Today we celebrate and remember the act of baptism. One of two sacraments we practice in the Methodist church, baptism is often described as an outward sign of an inward grace, and the way in which those who believe in Jesus are marked for discipleship.

In other words, it is two fold: 1. it is a public display of an inner decision to accept the love and grace given to us by God. 2. It is the way believers mark their life in Jesus and the church.

It is a long time practice of the church, rich in symbolism and meaning. And whether it is done by pouring or sprinkling water over the head, or immersing the entire body, the meaning / purpose is the same - to tell all those who gather, “I have given my life to Jesus and will do all I can to let go of the life symbolically buried beneath the waters of God’s love and rise into the new life given me in Jesus’ name.” And for those bringing their baby or young child for baptism, it is the moment they say, “I remember that which I believe in Jesus and chose to stand against the evil

injustices of this world, and want you, the church community, to help raise my child into the follower of Jesus he/she is meant to be.”

For the 75-80 percent or more of you that already know all that, great. Good job. Well done. To you I say, remember your baptism and be grateful.

For the remaining 20-25 percent who maybe didn't know some of that, or wasn't brought up within the church, it's o.k., don't worry. To you I say, baptism is personal and communal. You have to decide if it is the next step for you and where you are in your faith. It is something you and God decide to share and celebrate with the body of believers.

Hear this church, baptism is not your ticket into heaven. It is not a requirement to fulfill some holy expectation. It does not make you any better a believer than any other believer. It is not a free ride to continue acting in ways that hurt or ignore others or to do things that keep God at arm's length.

It is simply and profoundly...plainly and beautifully an act of joyful obedience representing the transformation happening from within, or as Frederick Buechner put it: “Baptism consists of getting dunked or sprinkled. Which technique is used matters about as much as whether you pray kneeling or standing on your head. Dunking is a better symbol, however. Going under symbolizes the end of everything about your life that is less

than human. Coming up again symbolizes the beginning in you of something strange and new and hopeful. You can breathe again.”

Yes church, come on in, the water is fine!

Sing Vs. 1 and chorus of Find Me in the River by Martin Smith

Find me in the River

Find me on my knees

I've walked against the water

Now I'm waiting if you please

We've longed to see the roses

But never felt the thorns

And bought our pretty crowns

But never paid the price

Find me in the River

Find me there

Find me on my knees with my soul laid bare

Even though you're gone

And I'm cracked and dry

Find me in the River

I'm waiting here

## **Part II.**

Read Matthew 3:13-17

Why did he do it? He certainly didn't have to. Of all people, he should be exempt from baptism. Why didn't he just stand high on the bank and watch the others? Why didn't he just let all the others come for baptism, those who need a second chance, messed it up, and those who waded out so deep into trouble they weren't sure whether to turn back or finish crossing? Of all people, he didn't need forgiven did he? Let the people whose lives are just a tangle of poor judgement, ridicule and criticism, and those rich in things and poor in soul.

Why did he do it? Because Jesus approached baptism as an act of solidarity with our human condition. This solidarity is specifically grounded in that which God requires of all humankind, namely, humbly submitting to and trusting in God in all things. In his humanity, Jesus stands with us in the waters of this life. In his divinity, he finds us in the river and brings us through to the other side.

He did it out of loyalty to God. It is the moment in his life that declares who he is and what is expected as the son of God. On that level it is personal.

He did it out of love for us, showing us that he is with us, he stands with us, he wades the currents of this life with us. It teaches what is expected of us as followers of Jesus.

Baptism summons us away from a life saturated in greed, self gratification, judgmentalism, fear, empty promises, and shame to a life dripping with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self control.

Baptism is a personal decision lived out in the wider community.

\*Sing Vs. 2 and chorus of Find Me in the River by Martin Smith

Find me in the River

Find me on my knees

I've walked against the water

Now I'm waiting if you please

We didn't count on suffering

We didn't count on pain

But if there are blessings in the valley

Then in the River I will wait

Find me in the River

Find me there

Find me on my knees with my soul laid bare

Even though you're gone

And I'm cracked and dry

Find me in the River

I'm waiting here

### **The Bringing of the Water**

Roger shares while Jenothy pours the water into basins with colored glass stones.

1. We remember the waters of our story - parts known and parts yet to be.
2. We remember the waters of healing and renewal - washing our wounds and restoring our hope.
3. We remember the waters of our identity - we belong to God, we belong to one another.

### **Part III.**

Luther said, “remember your baptism.” How can people do that? In Luther’s church, most baptisms were of infants brought by their mothers and fathers. How could they remember their baptisms? Why did he say such a thing?

Was it to make you feel guilty? “Aha! You’ve strayed from your baptism!” Everyone of us strays from, forgets, or denies our baptism in ways we may not even realize. “Show me a bird who can say, ‘I look like my song.’ We all fall short.

No, what Luther had in mind was this: Remember your baptism by claiming yourself to be a child of God and by going about God's business - serving other people. It means touching, loving, going, doing, caring for people. The crying and broken-hearted people. Hungry and diseased people. Alienated people. Suffering people. That is the business of one who follows Jesus - one who through baptism lives out the love and grace of Jesus.

Come to the water, may God find us there - gather with others who are finding their way. Come to the water and remember the love waiting there for you. Come to the water and receive blessing, new life, freedom, hope, and healing.

Come, remember your baptism and be grateful.

Come, consider baptism and be thankful.

Come, celebrate the waters of story, renewal and identity, and be glad.

As you feel ready, please come and dip your hands in the water, take a small glass stone as a reminder of this day - a reminder of God's love - and a reminder of who you are in Jesus - who we are to be in our world.

Close with the following unison prayer and the Lord's Prayer:

**O God, we rejoice and give thanks in your grace. Grace given. Grace received. We thank you that you have claimed us. You wash and strengthen us. You guide and empower us. Make us water in a dry and thirsty world. Make us places of refreshment. Establish us in love.**

**With all your people, may our cups be filled as we fill the cups of others. May our lives overflow in service and love.**

Our Father, who art in heaven...AMEN