

Devotions – May 17-23, 2015
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Remembering Our Baptisms

During the Easter season, we begin each Sunday service at Faith Lutheran with a Thanksgiving for Baptism in which I invite our children to come to the baptismal font to learn a little bit about baptism and its symbols. These devotions are an expansion of that idea. During Easter, we remember that in our baptisms, we died with Christ; and through our baptisms, we will also be raised to new life as he was.

Sunday, May 17, 2015

Text: Acts 8:36-38

As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

I am constantly amazed by the simpleness of the sacraments. Our church buildings, our songs, our worship and our decorations can be quite elaborate, but not the sacraments. Oh sure, we can build fancy baptismal fonts and buy only exquisitely crafted communion vessels, but that doesn't change what they hold: water, bread, and the fruit of the vine. Once you strip away the outer decorations, you're left with these simple, basic elements.

God seems to be partial to simpleness. Water is one of the most common elements on the planet, and for many (not all, unfortunately), it is so common and convenient that we overlook its importance as a necessary element of all life. But even though water is common, simple, ordinary, and even a little boring, God uses it to bring grace and forgiveness. Nothing is too simple for God's use. And if God can use simple water for such great things, imagine what God can do with us!

Let us pray: *God of love, through the simple water of baptism you bring wholeness and life to your adopted children. Use us simple, ordinary human beings, to share that wholeness and life with all of creation. Amen.*



Monday, May 18, 2015

Text: Acts 10:36-38

“You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how we went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”

It's a curious thing, this anointing business, isn't it? Unlike water, being anointed with oil is hardly a concept most of us are familiar with, aside from stories in the Bible. Unlike water, oil is something that takes work to make, and depending on the oil, can be incredibly scarce and costly. But at our baptism, we are marked with the cross of Christ, often with oil on our foreheads.

What I love about being anointed with oil, having the mark of the cross drawn on my forehead, is that oil is absorbed by the skin. The mark of Christ is absorbed into the body, where it stays. From that moment on, everywhere we go, we take Christ with us. We belong to a God who never leaves, never abandons us; and through us, the Holy Spirit can work amazing things.

Let us pray: Nurturing God, in our baptisms, you marked us as your own, as adopted children of God. As you send us out into the world, stay with us, and let your will be known through us. Amen.



Tuesday, May 19, 2015

Text: Galatians 3:27-28

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

“Why are you wearing a dress?” is my favorite children's sermon question of all time. Yes, the alb does look like a dress, albeit a dress that went out of fashion hundreds and hundreds of years ago. And children are not afraid to ask questions that adults would consider out of place or inappropriate for that particular moment (which is one of the reasons I love interacting with them—they keep me on my toes!).

The alb is the baptismal garment that used to be given to every Christian at their baptism, a visible reminder that we have “put on Christ”. I don't know how Christ manages to do it—Christians are of every size and shape, from every nation and people. We know of the dangers of “one size fits all” in our thinking and theology. And yet Christ covers us all, makes us all one in him. It is a remarkable feat to bring together so many disparate groups. We couldn't do it on our own (and we have tried). But Christ can, and Christ does, unite us all in one family.

Let us pray: God of mercy, you gave each of us, your sons and daughters, a new identity in Christ. Make us brothers and sisters to each other, and to our neighbors, that we would care for them as we would our own families. Amen.



Wednesday, May 20, 2015

Text: Acts 22:16

“And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.”

I love showers. I think they're the greatest thing since Betty White (who actually precedes sliced

bread!). I had to be dragged out of the shower after swim team practice as a kid, and most days, I only get out of the shower because I've run out of hot water. There's nothing like the feeling of getting clean.

Maybe that's why I love the Thanksgiving for Baptism so much. I'm also “that guy” who uses the Thanksgiving for Baptism as the perfect excuse to grab a few pine tree branches, give them to the kids in the congregation, and have them go out and sprinkle as many people as possible with water. It's good to be reminded that, in baptism, our sins have been washed away, like after a good long shower. We human beings are prone to sin right from the moment of our births. We can't get clean on our own. It is only after being showered in God's grace that the sin of our humanness washes away, leaving us clean revitalized with new and abundant life.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, in baptism you washed us clean, freeing us from the stain of sin and death. Renew us continually through your Holy Spirit, and forgive us when we get ourselves dirty, bringing us back to you. Amen.*



Thursday, May 21, 2015

Text: Matthew 5:14-16

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

While in seminary, it took me a long time to answer the question, “What do you do?” How would I respond? Did I say, “I'm a seminary student studying to be a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America”? I confess, I most often responded with, “Oh, I'm a graduate student,” and hoped they wouldn't inquire any further. I wasn't exactly lying—I was earning a master's degree, after all. But I wasn't exactly open about who I was, either, since I feared ridicule or mockery would follow. We don't live in a world in which Christians are the default or the accepted norm anymore, and pastors are viewed with more suspicion than ever.

Still, this is the world Jesus called us into in our baptisms, a world desperately in need of the light of Christ. The candle lit and given at our baptisms is a visible sign of that light we give off. The best part, of course, is that it's not our light that shines through us. It is the light of Christ, a light far brighter and far more illuminating than the little light we can give. Which is especially good news for people like me; just ask my wife: sometimes, I'm not very bright!

Let us pray: *God of light, you called us in baptism to go out into a world plagued by darkness. Shine your light in us, that through us, we may bring a bright hope to those in need. Amen.*



Friday, May 22, 2015

Text: Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every

weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

My favorite day of the entire year isn't Christmas, the most important holiday in the United States. It isn't Easter, the most important holiday in the church. It isn't my birthday, the most important holiday in history (kidding!).

My favorite day of the year is All Saints' Day. On this day, November 1, the church gathers and remembers all those in the faith who've gone before us, who've joined the great "cloud of witnesses" that continually surrounds the throne of God and us. In a culture preoccupied with death and avoiding it at all costs, the Christian hope for new life stands apart as a message of hope and comfort for those of us left behind.

At our funerals, we are draped in a white cloth, a pall that calls to mind the baptismal garment we were given in life. Thus, baptism is present at the beginning of our lives in Christ and is there at the end, welcoming us into the arms of God at both times, assuring us of the love and care we receive in both life and death.

Let us pray: *God who calls us home, you welcomed us with open arms and clothed us with Christ in our baptism. When we have run the race with perseverance, and at the last come home to you, welcome us with those same open arms. Amen.*



Saturday, May 23, 2015

Text: John 20:21-22

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The Acts account of the giving of the Holy Spirit is well known. It is a dramatic occurrence involving the rush of wind, the appearance of fire, and the ecstatic speaking of the disciples in different languages. It's hard to compete with such a powerful image of the coming of the Holy Spirit!

But then there's the account in the Gospel according to John. In this account, Jesus himself gives the disciples the Holy Spirit with a breath, something soft and tender, after telling them, "Peace be with you."

It's no secret that we live in a world that is in need of peace. Depending on how you count, there are about 50 armed conflicts occurring around the world right now. If the Holy Spirit brings peace, then I am glad that, in our baptisms, we have hands laid on our heads. The Holy Spirit comes, not in the violence or drama of fire and shouting, but in the gentle touch of one human being to another, in a sign that says, "Peace be with you."

Let us pray: *God of peace, you gave to your disciples an advocate for peace. Send us out, filled with the Holy Spirit, to be peacemakers and advocates for an end to conflict, hatred, and violence. Amen.*

