

Matthew 3:13-17

The Water's Fine

My husband Ken and I enjoy spending time camping especially where there are lakes to be explored and enjoyed. We both also always like to check out the water. As many of you are aware, lake water tends to be fairly cool and at times cold, this is especially known by those whose camps are along the shoreline of Lake Superior. Yet, that rarely stops Ken and I from donning our swimsuits and heading into the water. At times one of us heads in first and shouts back to the other, "The water's fine!" to encourage the other to brave the cold lake.

Water is a wonderful thing. It cleanses and renews us. Many people are aware that water is my element. At times I am encouraged to join an aqua fitness type class, but for me I just swim, the water becomes a place to let the concerns of life be swept away with each stroke. It is my happy place, my place of peace, a kind of meditation. The water restores me.

In many cultural stories of birthing or rebirth water plays an important role, so it is not surprising that water is the symbol or sign, the basic element that is used in baptism. Baptism represents us dying to an old way of living and being rebirthed so to speak. Baptism indicates that we want our children to reject a way of life that separates them from God, the kind of life that is spiteful and self-centred...and instead live a life that is loving, giving, compassionate, and concerned for justice."¹Baptism and communion are both "opportunities for us to acknowledge the reality of God's presence and love in our lives. We do so by responding to God's claims and publicly committing ourselves [and our children] to God and God's ways."²

The scripture today was a retelling of the baptism of our Lord Jesus. We understand that Jesus did not need to be baptized, but it was a way for him to connect with the global human family. This baptism was for him a naming and a commissioning. God called Jesus the Beloved. It was only after this baptism that Jesus was sent out to face the wilderness temptation and then begin his public ministry. Though we are not Jesus, we know that we too are named God's beloved.

You may be known by many names. As a child, my nickname was *cadeaujte*, meaning small gift in Dutch. I came five years after my older brother and sister and I guess my parents were ready for another child, hence the nickname. It was shortened to "teaut" and I loved that name. I always felt special within my family as that was my special

¹ What happens in Baptism? a pamphlet for parents of infants. The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

² Ibid.

name. Other names that make me feel special and loved are mom, sister, auntie, daughter, and now Grandma Joyce.

You may have names that made or make you feel special. Having said that, most of us know that school yard rhyme, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” We also know that it’s not true. Stick and stones may break bones, but names can also scar us for life. Parents or others who are supposed to be caring and loving, who refer to their children as worthless, a problem, shameful, an embarrassment, often using expletives to embellish the name calling, can do a lifetime of damage regardless of our age from childhood right into adulthood.

Whether or not you feel worthy, in baptism we are given the name Beloved. You are a beloved child of God. Whether or not you are baptized you are a beloved child of God. That is the name you carry with you – Beloved – and with that name comes the identity that you are a child of God. Regardless of anything else in your life, you can claim this! Yet, being baptized means to be part of community. To be baptized means that you are intentionally in relationship with other believers, those who understand that this is the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith. Baptism is like the commissioning moment of Jesus, where we too begin our work as part of a community of faith that longs to live in relationship with God and others. To be part of a family that loves, shows compassion, seeks redeeming justice, not just for ourselves but for the world.

Baptism is a beginning. It is not one and done. How often have I had people come to me and ask if they can get their child’s baptism done, or just get it done. This is not a moment of done. This is an inaugural moment for a lifetime of relationships, mission, growth, transformation, and turning to God.

In baptism we say, “the water’s fine”. And it is fine because the water of baptism gives witness to God’s love for God’s people. The water is fine because in and through it we find community and love, meaning and purpose.

I would be remiss if I didn’t also acknowledge that the church can be a place where people get hurt. Sadly, we are imperfect. Sometimes individuals hurt other individuals in the church. Gossip and power mongering can be rampant in communities of faith as we put up with a lot due to our understanding of what it should mean to be a Christian.

In 1994 The Presbyterian Church in Canada made confession for the treatment of Indigenous people in its historical work. Just last year a confession to God and LGBTQI people was prepared and presented to the General Assembly. Right now the PCC is looking at how racism has and continues to be a challenge in our policies and work with congregations and the church at large.

Still, we, the church, aspire to be a place where the sacraments are visible signs of an invisible grace. Where baptism is a new beginning, a commissioning, and a place where relationships with each other and with God thrive and grow. Where we reach out to walk along side others, asking what their need is and finding ways to help them also know

the love of God through our words and actions. Welcoming all into our family of faith with much love, grace, and compassion.

If you are not baptized and you have questions, please connect with me or another pastor. If this is something you feel called to in your life now, that is wonderful. Regardless of how you experience this, baptized or not, know that God loves you, loves your children, loves those we think are not loveable. Has named you Beloved.

The waters of baptism are an invitation to go deeper, whether you are parent of a baptized child, a baptized adult, or not baptized. The water's fine. It is a place of beginnings, of healing, of wholeness, of commissioning, and of community.

Here Jesus says to you, I've been there, I've done this, come on in "the water's fine!"