

1st Sunday after Epiphany C Baptism of our Lord 09 January 2022

Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 3:15-17,21,22

St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth

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Grace, peace, and baptismal love to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Isaiah 43:1-4

Thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour... you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you.

Luke 3:21,22

Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Let's pray...

I'm not afraid to admit that as a child, I could get up to my fair share of mischief. Just ask my mum what it was like when my sister and I had been cooped up in the house together all day. We'd taunt each other and fight and I can still hear Mum's voice vividly warning us, "You just wait until your father gets home", before taking a Bex and having a lie down. Evening came and Dad got home from work. Mum told Dad what we'd been up to. Dad gave us that look that meant we were about to cop what we deserved. And the funny thing is, I was never smart enough to try this pearler, "You can't touch me. I'm baptised!"

I wish it were that easy, that clear, that simple. I wish I could say to the woes of my life, "You can't touch me. I'm baptised!" I wish I could say to the struggles and difficulties of my life, "You can't touch me. I'm baptised!" I wish

I could say to the changes and anxieties of life, “You can’t touch me. I’m baptised!” But that’s not how baptism works.

Despite my baptism I have, like every one of you, suffered sorrows, losses, difficulties, struggles, and had to face unpleasant things I wish I hadn’t. And despite my baptism, I was still belted, grounded, and had privileges withdrawn... And yet, “You can’t touch me. I’m baptised!” speaks a deep truth. We are untouchable. To varying degrees, we know that our existence, identity, and value aren’t limited to time and space. There’s much more to us than our biological existence. We are beloved children of God. We know the gift of baptism.

Baptism doesn’t eliminate our difficulties, fix our problems, take away the pain, or change the circumstances of our lives. Instead, it changes us and offers a way through our difficulties, sorrows, problems, struggles and ultimately, a way through death. Baptism surpasses our biological existence and offers us a vision of life as it might be. Baptism offers us a way of being that’s neither limited by nor suffers from our “creatureliness.” Through baptism we no longer live according to the biological laws of nature but by relationship with God.

This is the God, our God, who, through the Prophet Isaiah, says,

‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine’ (Isaiah 43:1).

That means when we pass through the waters of sorrow and difficulty, God is with us. The rivers that can drown will not overwhelm us. That means when we walk through the fire of loss and ruin we’re not burned. The flames that can destroy won’t consume us. For he is the Lord our God, the Holy one of Israel, our Saviour [43:2,3].

To know this, to trust this, to experience this, is the gift of baptism and baptismal living always exists on the border between temporal life and eternal life. That border is the river Jordan. Geographically, symbolically, and theologically, the Jordan River is the border on which baptism happens. It’s the border between the wilderness and the promised land; the border

between life as survival and life eternal; the border between sin and forgiveness; the border between the womb and the tomb; the border between death and life. We all stand on that border our whole lives. We experience that border as a place of loss, fear, pain. We experience it as a place of joy, hope, and healing. Everything coalesces at the border of baptism.

And the only reason we can stand at the border of baptism without drowning is because Jesus stood there first. We stand on the very same border on which Jesus' baptism took place.

'When Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased"' (Luke 3:21,22).

Jesus' baptism is for our sake and salvation. His baptism makes ours possible. The water of baptism doesn't sanctify Jesus. Jesus sanctifies the water for our baptism. The water that drowns becomes the spring of eternal life.

Ritually, we are baptised only once. Yet throughout our life we return daily to the waters of baptism. Luther teaches us: 'that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new person should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever' (Small Catechism). And what's the origin of Luther's thought? St Paul writes in Romans chapter six: 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life' (Romans 6:3,4).

What Luther means by daily contrition and repentance, is to live by our baptismal vows:

- To confess our belief in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because God first believed in and chose us.

- To maintain and continue the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers because the Holy Spirit has descended upon and filled us.
- To persevere in resisting evil, and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord because the heavens have been opened to us and we have seen our true home.
- To proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ because we've heard the voice from heaven declare us beloved children with whom he is well pleased.
- To seek and serve Christ in all people, loving our neighbour as ourselves; striving for justice, peace, and dignity for every human being because that reflects God's image in us.

At other times our own bodies remind us of the waters of baptism – we shed tears.

Our Creator knew before the foundation of the world that sins would hound us all the days of our lives. He knew they'd drive us to despair. So, out of his unfathomable well of grace, he has given us two fonts that fill with tears, drip with prayers of confession, overflow with cries of help, and pour out our heart's declaration of surrender.

The ups and downs of living remind us that we dwell on the borderland. We return to it over and over again to be absorbed into the open heavens, to be bathed by God's breath, and to let the name "beloved" wash over us... to hear that we are forgiven.

There's truth in what I didn't have the presence of mind to say to my father, "You can't touch me. I'm baptised!" Do you believe that? Do you have the conviction to claim it for yourself? "You can't touch me. I'm baptised!" "You can't touch me. I'm baptised!" I think my dad was just making sure I didn't forget the daily dying to sin bit. Go, dear saints! Shout from the depth of your soul, "You can't touch me. I'm baptised!" And live it! Amen.

And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.