



## **Sermons from Northwood United Church**

**“Borne on the water.”**

**Psalm 29, Mark 1:4-11. Acts 19:1-7**

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**May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.**

**I used to have a spiritual director, a man of deep faith and wisdom who used to talk about faith as “trusting the buoyancy of God.” You know when you are floating on your back and you tense up your body, you sink, but if you relax and just let the water hold you up, you float and it is relatively effortless, albeit kind of counter intuitive. The harder you try to make the water hold you up, the faster you sink, but the more you just let the water be the water under you, the more it does. Interesting image eh? I’ve been thinking about water this week as a central image of God and as our central sacrament of the Holy.**

**Do you remember your baptism? I don’t. In fact I have never even seen a picture of my baptism. Apparently however, I was baptized, and I guess how that I have children of my own I can forgive the lack of pictures. Life slowly and steadily inches out nice things like pictures with every new child on the scene. I was the 4<sup>th</sup>. No pictures. I think its pretty much the grace of God that I was baptized at all.**

**Come to think of it, baptism is all about grace, about un-earned blessing, about gift, and cherishing that gift, behold the gift. Behold a life, a child, so vulnerable and so untouched by life.**

**Do you remember your baptism? Probably not, unless you were baptized as an adult. But remembered or not, at baptism the community gathers around you and proclaims what God proclaimed over Jesus: “This is my beloved, and we are well pleased!” Words that every soul longs to hear and know to be true. The blessing that, when we trust it, holds us up like water.**

**Yet it is one thing for the parents and community of faith to proclaim the blessing, to offer those soul quenching words and mean them. It is another thing altogether for us to come to the point at which we believe it, and know that we are a blessing, that we belong to God, and to take that identity and responsibility for ourselves.**

**All of which brings me to our scriptures for today. The psalm declares God’s voice over all creation, a powerful voice, the only voice that ultimately matters. It is the same voice that hovered over creation at the beginning, the Spirit brooding over the waters of creation bringing all things into being with a word. That same creative Spirit appears in the story of Jesus’ baptism, sweeping over those waters and that association tells us two things: first, that something new in the life of Jesus being created, about to happen, but also that this path that Jesus walked is intimately connected with a much larger story of God’s creative power bringing life, new life through the Spirit. There is a deep connection between God’s blessing on all creation and God’s blessing in Jesus, that the particular story of Jesus is held and rests upon the water of God’s greater story of blessing for all creation. And I believe that his baptism is the key moment in which his life and ministry is borne, held up upon the water of God. And that holding up, that trusting, that faith relationship is what feeds and strengthens his life.**

**Years ago the Rev A J Gordon was out for a walk in the country. In the far distance, in front of a farm house he saw a man pumping an old fashioned hand pump. He watched**

for a while. He was fascinated. The man pumped steadily and evenly, never looking up, never missing a beat. Rev Gordon stood there, thinking about the wisdom of such steady, even work. Far better, he thought, than rushing, and then having to take rest breaks. Far better than overdoing it. But the more he watched, the more he was captivated and amazed by the steady evenness of the man's pumping. Never a stop. Never a pause, Never faltering.

So he walked closer. Closer- to get a better look at this remarkable worker. And when he got close enough, reality suddenly hit him. It was not a man at all. It was a painted wooden figure. The arm that was pumping so steadily and tirelessly was hinges at the elbow, and attached to the pump handle. And the water was gushing forth, not because of any pumping effort on the part of the wooden man, but because this was an artesian spring, with its own pressure. So the wooden man was not pumping the water. Quite the reverse, the water was pumping the man.

And it is that reverse reality that we celebrate today. The gift- the blessing of life and the Spirit which we do not create, but rather which creates us, and moves us, and as we let it hold us up and flow through us, gives the power to create. The Spirit's blessing over Jesus set in motion a creative life changing ministry, artesian spring of life giving water, filled him with vital power. It is that vital Spirit that we celebrate today, to which we commit ourselves today, that it might flow through us and make us new today.

Our lives are not simply our own. They are borne upon the waters of God, signified in the waters of our baptism. And we as a community call each other to trust the buoyancy of God in our lives, because that is not always easy. The community is primarily a cluster of people who have sensed the blessing of God, who have decided to try to trust God in our lives, and gather to help each other do exactly that. And that is why the font is here in front of us every week, as a reminder of God's blessing, as a reminder of our utter dependence on the buoyancy of God.

Which leads me to close with the words of William Stafford in his poem, Ask me. He writes:

Some time, when the river is ice ask me  
Mistakes I have made. Ask me whether  
What I have done is my life. Others  
Have come in their slow way into  
My thought, and some have tried to help  
Or to hurt: ask me what difference  
Their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.  
You and I can turn and look  
At the silent river and wait. We know  
The current is there, hidden; and there  
Are comings and goings from miles away  
That hold the stillness exactly before us.  
What the river says, that is what I say.

Amen