

Living Wet
July 26, 2015
Matthew 28:18-20

Our Scripture reading, found in the last three verses of the last chapter of Matthew, is often called the Great Commission. It is a call for followers of the Way of Jesus to continue his ministry.

Listen for the voice of our Still Speaking God as I read the passage from *The Inclusive Bible*.

Jesus came forward and addressed them in these words:

“All authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.

Baptize them in the name
of Abba God,
and of the Only Begotten,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you.
And know that I am with you always, even until the end of the world!”

May God bless the reading and hearing of these wise words, and let us pray. Creating God remind us of the centrality of water in the story of new creations:

- in the first creation story you took formless water and shaped the heavens and the earth;
- each new human creation begins with months of formation in water and the breaking of such waters enables birth; and
- in baptismal waters humans are marked as God’s beloved children – new creations in Christ.

Take and use my words to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

The great reformer Martin Luther was fond of saying “remember your baptism.” With that in mind, I placed some words on the front of this morning’s worship bulletin designed to invite you to remember the details of your baptism as you prepared for worship.

I admit that a few of you who saw the bulletin well beforehand told me that I was asking the impossible as they had no recall of their own baptism. So I will share my memory instead.

But wait . . . I also don't remember! I was much too young. I was only a few months old. I have to rely on and trust in the memories of those who were present that day. Since it was my parents' decision to have me baptized, I will ask them.

Mother and Dad, will you please come forward? Go ahead and make your way to the pulpit and share with the good folks in this community of faith the short version of my baptismal story.

(baptismal account: where? why? wearing? Godparents?)

That, dear friends, is the story of how I started living wet. It is a story that started that day, but one that continues to this day.

In all honesty, my memory is far more capable of recalling other baptisms.

Over the years I watched many baptisms . . .

- Growing up in a Presbyterian church I remember seeing many infants baptized during Sunday morning services.
- As a teenager I remember friends telling me how in their church people were REALLY baptized in the way they understood the Bible required: by full immersion under water. I also remember not really grasping what this would look like until I observed this type of baptism first-hand.
- As a young adult I remember watching people shiver as they entered the water of a pool behind a church member's home on a day that was far too cold for anyone to be in a swimming pool.

As someone in the ministry, I have officiated or participated in many baptisms and lessons about baptism. . .

In many congregations I required confirmands to interview their parents, godparents, and others to learn their own baptismal stories then to share those accounts with the class. Even many of the students who loathed the idea of any homework, returned to tell their stories with passion and in great detail.

I especially remember one student who completed the confirmation education process even though he had never been baptized. So, prior to his confirmation we planned his baptism. As a teenager who was choosing to follow the Way of Jesus he wanted the baptism to be intense and he wanted to get really wet from it to show how serious he

was. In other words, I knew the church's norm of sprinkling was out of the question. I had to convince him that baptism by immersion was also not possible logistically in the sanctuary. We settled on a middle ground: baptism by affusion. The water was poured over his head three times in the names of our Triune God.

I also remember a few occasions when things did not go exactly as planned with baptisms, but I think I will keep those to myself for now.

These are some of my many memories. I invite you to remember your baptism. Think of the details you know as you remember them or, if you were quite young, as they were told to you.

As you remember your baptism, know that whether it was done by sprinkling, pouring, or immersing and whether you were a young child, a teenager, or an adult it was a starting point. It was the day that you started living wet. It was an occasion when before God and God's people you were marked as Christ's own forever.

If you are seeking a physical reminder please come to the baptismal font following the service and dip your fingers in the water. You can simply say "I remember my baptism" or may choose to make the sign of the cross on the back of your other hand or on your forehead.

Whether or not you come forward for a tactile experience, I encourage you to recommit to living wet. Make a choice today to live as God's beloved child and to be an active part of God's family of faith at this stage in your life and in this congregation.

And, even as you remember your baptism and recommit to living wet, I invite you to move beyond yourself by remembering the baptisms of those closest to you – of your children, Godchildren, nieces and nephews, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Remember also the baptism of Sebastian and of other children who have been baptized since you became a part of Fort Myers Congregational United Church of Christ. As you remember these baptisms, recommit to your role as nurturer in the lives of these precious people.

And, finally, I invite you to reconsider the biblical imagery for baptism. In your bulletin you will find a double sided piece of paper containing ten New Testament images, including new birth, a cleansing bath, being clothed in Jesus, and being adopted into a new family. Consider all of them and then focus on one. To give you time and a reflective environment, Thad will come and play the organ.