

In the Water

Isaiah 42:1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 "He will not cry out or raise *His voice*, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 "A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." 5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison. 8 "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images. 9 "Behold, the former things have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim *them* to you."

NAU Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. 16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I.
Give me words that I may speak give us ears that we may hear and through
your Holy Spirit help us understand.
Amen.

I have to admit that I have been thinking about summer this past week. Part of it is the warm temperatures, but it was also getting my Johnny's seed catalog .

I love summer weather, even thinking about it brings back so many memories. I was thinking about swimming- I think with tomorrow's storm I'll put my suit away for a while. I always loved to go swimming as a kid. It is great to go to the local watering hole with a bunch of friends on a summer day.

For a few years we lived near a lake. The kids would all gather in the morning and we would all stand around for a while looking at the water.

This particular lake was inundated with algae. During the day the water would be stirred around and it was not really noticeable, but overnight the algae would all bunch up together at the end of the lake where the beach was located.

So we would look out over the sort of scummy looking mat of algae floating on the water and nobody wanted to go in. We would skip rocks, walk along the edge kicking the water and we would run around the beach. Eventually one of us would enter the water where it was clear of algae, take a deep breath and swim out under the algae and splash before surfacing.

The splashing made a clear spot in the water and once the first person had made a hole then we began clearing the water of algae by splashing it out of the way.

We all joined in until we had a clear place to swim.

One person led the way for all of us, and then we joined in together.

People who have been to the Jordan River say it is a small muddy stream most of the time except when it swells from rains and becomes a large muddy stream. And it was at the banks of the Jordan River that Jesus came to John the Baptist.

John was there to baptize people in preparation for the Messiah's arrival. He was calling people to repent, to turn around, to go another way. John says I baptize with water, but he will baptize with fire and with the Holy Spirit. This is something new and different.

The waters of baptism were a symbolic washing away of sins, a cleansing. The last thing he expected was to be baptizing the Messiah.

John expected to be baptized by Jesus. But there in the water, and Jesus walks down the bank and into the water.

Jesus was baptized, something new happened. The heavens opened, the Spirit of God came upon him: this was a whole new baptism.

Jesus goes into the water to say here is a new baptism, a new cleansing, this baptism is of the Holy Spirit, come and follow me in.

Today I want to talk about baptism, yours, mine and ours. Baptism is where we begin our journey to Christ. at the fount, in the water we are given a new identity: we leave the River Jordan, we leave the fount as Christian. This is where we begin our Christening.

Sometimes we hear people say that someone was christened, meaning they were baptized.

But baptism and christening are two different things. In baptism we begin the process of christening as we are transformed and made more and more like Christ. This is a life long process which begins at baptism.

For most of us this happened as a baby. Your parents and God-Parents or sponsors made promises on your behalf.

Will you encourage this child to renounce the powers of evil and receive the freedom of new life in Christ?

These promises are made for a little one.

If it is an adult or older child the questions are direct:

Do you renounce the powers of evil and desire the freedom of new life in Christ?

Do you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

Do you promise, by the grace of God to be Christ's disciple, to follow in the way of our savior, to show love and justice and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ.

Do you promise, according to the grace given to you, to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ, celebrating Christ's presence and furthering Christ's mission in all the world?

These are the promises of our baptism, vows made to God.
I could explore each of these, but I'll save that for another day.

These promises are a reoccurring theme in the Christian life. They are said at our baptism, but these are the same vows that our confirmands make at confirmation. Confirmation is confirming our baptismal vows.

When a new member comes to us from another church, they repeat their baptismal vows and reaffirm their promises to God and to the Body of Christ.

When I was ordained I also had to reaffirm those vows and make the promises yet again.

This is the covenant that we enter when we become Christians, Christ's people. We make promises to God and to each other in baptism, confirmation and in membership, promises that shape our community.

We join as one body to be Christ's people here and now.

We may think of baptism as a personal thing, it happens for one person. One person is baptized at a time and only once. This sounds very personal. But what does it mean to be baptized?

Baptism has the connotation of being washed, but there are some other things we affirm about baptism. One is that when a person is baptized the Holy Spirit enters that person's life in a new way. Another is that we are brought together as a family or as we say as one body.

This is why I will generally insist that baptism happen in the context of community worship, because baptism is not just the promises of the person to God but to the community as well.

One body. This is not an individual thing, we become one body. We are joined to others who also take Christ as their name.
Yes, Jesus began the process being baptized by John, and then he calls to us: come on in the water and join me.

We are one body, brought together in our baptism.
We are one body, made one by the covenant we make in baptism.

Covenant is what makes it all possible.
Covenants are promises.
There have been a number of covenants with God.

God has made a number of promises.

The first covenant was God's promise not to destroy the world with flood- the symbol of this covenant is the rainbow in the sky.

God made covenant with Israel and led them from Egypt to the promised land- the sign of this covenant is the law, the ten commandments.

God made these covenants, these promises with people and they still remain. These covenants did not change human beings, after the flood people have continued to sin. And the Israelites still did not follow the Law even after reaching the promised land. They could not follow the law precisely, but more importantly they did not maintain their relationship with God.

God gave the Israelites the Law so they could be in better relationship with God and each other. Trouble is, the people used the Law as a way of distancing themselves from God and as an excuse for fighting with each other, so that by the time Jesus came along the leaders were bogged down with legalism. And relationship with God was far from the people.

John called the people to come and be ready for something new

Isaiah told of his coming: **Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.**

Jesus waded into the waters of the Jordan river and the Holy Spirit came upon him. He entered the water to make way for us to follow him in. We are invited to join him in the water, in his baptism and to become part of one body.

This is not an obligation. This is not a requirement. This is not a mandate. It is an invitation.

We are invited to follow Jesus into the water, into the muddy waters of Jesus baptism to become a whole new creation, part of a body.

We promise this for babies or for ourselves in our baptism, we promise it again in confirmation, in welcoming new members and in the process of acknowledging ordination we make these same promises to be a part of one body with Jesus Christ as our head.

Like kids playing at the lake we gather at the waters edge while one brave soul takes the first plunge. Jesus took that first plunge and calls for us to join him.

We affirm the one body when we gather here as the Body of Christ in The First Church of Monson. We come together as one body in this church with Christ as our head.

Being connected to Jesus Christ means being connected to the Church. I know that many people say they can find God wherever they are and they don't need to be part of the Church to be close to God.

I agree that God is everywhere. It is certainly possible to have a good relationship with God without going to church, but fulfilling our baptismal vows requires a little more than just walking in the woods with God.

When we join with the body of Christ we also have challenges.

One of the challenges we face today is the competition for our time and energy.

Sunday worship had no competition 2 generations ago, there was not much else going on Sunday mornings. Even one generation ago it was not like it is today. We see many people on a rotating basis for various reasons.

I don't know about you, but I feel like something is missing when people are not here.

Who is missing today?

They may see this on TV next week. Some people do stay connected that way, but it isn't the same.

We miss them. We are part of the same body and when someone is not here, something is missing.

Remember the banner ch ch and it says what is missing? U R.

The nominating committee is certainly faced with this issue as they try to fill the committee seats. We are pulled this way and that. We must make choices every day. People feel like they don't have the time and energy to serve on committees.

If all our committees were filled the workload would be spread further making it easier for everyone. People who aren't able to serve on a committee can still put their energies into the life of the church in countless ways.

We are one body and need each part.

We are bound in covenant as Christ's people.

This covenant calls us to join with Jesus in his work and life.

And Jesus is there in the muddy water saying come on in with me the water's fine.

We may stand on the shore looking at the muddy water like the kids at the lake looked at the green scum, not wanting to get into something too gross, too difficult, too time consuming.

It would be nice if Jesus was on the beach in the Bahamas or something like that with the beautiful water calling us in for a nice swim- maybe we could all go snorkeling with Jesus, but the reality is that Jesus calls us to join him in the muddy waters of life.

Jesus is the One spoken of by Isaiah: I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.

Jesus wades into the muddy waters of life.

I will be saying more about the muddy waters next week.

Yes, Jesus promises us blessings beyond our imagination, and we make promises as well. The journey begins as we wade into the water and join Jesus. We are joined as one with all who wade in with us.

This is what the promises of baptism mean, we promise to follow Jesus, we promise to work for him in the world and we promise to serve him as part of the church.

Jesus has made a way for us into the water. He is in there and is calling to us to follow him in together.

This is what holds us together as The First Church of Monson; the baptism of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God,
AMEN.

