

“What Lies in the Waters”
Based on Mark 1:4-11
Preached on Jan. 15, 2012

Fellow baptized saints, it was a long trek from Jerusalem to the Jordan River, fifteen miles, like walking from where the Perimeter meets St. Mary’s, all the way through the city to the Perimeter on the other side, but Jesus was looking forward to it. The hot dusty path curved out before Him down towards the dark snake that was the Jordan River. Typically that path would be empty, nothing but rocks and sand, and perhaps the odd traveller, but that day it was different. Large crowds of people were spread all over in clumps, like the sparse shrubs that scattered the horizon, talking and making a commotion. They had come to be baptized by John who had been calling all people to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Crowds of sinners, hoping to have the burden of their sins removed. Waiting for the cleansing that lay in the waters.

Jesus’ eyes tracked to the largest crowd huddled around the riverbank. John was there, standing knee deep in the water, as people humbly approached him with their heads stooped low. He was baptizing them, a steady line of hundreds. That was where Jesus had to go. That was where He was needed.

The wind blew the hot sand across the path, as Jesus walked down towards the water, His feet sore from the trip. Nobody noticed Him. Nobody knew who He was. He was just part of the crowd. One of the many that had come to be baptized. But that was all about to change.

For although He was part of the crowd, He had not come hoping to have the burden of His sins removed. Although He had come to be baptized with sinners, He was not responding to the call of repentance. Although He identified with all of those sinful men, women and children, it was not a cleansing that awaited Him in the waters. He had come for a different reason.

Finally, His turn arrived. He knew what He had to do. He knew He had to enter the water. He knew His baptism would bring meaning to every baptism before His, and every baptism after His. He knew He had to put His perfect righteousness into the water, so that the cleansing and forgiveness all of these people were hoping for - would be real. But He also knew there was more to it.

His foot stirred in the dirt. He stepped forth from the riverbank and placed His sore, dry foot into the cool waters. As John baptized Him, He gave His perfection into the water, that every person who had been baptized with water and the Word, would receive it from Him. His purity. His righteousness. His perfection. But that was only half of what He had come to do. Something else lay in the waters for Jesus, something that He knew He would have to carry out with Him. Something that would destroy Him. Something that would kill Him. Something that cause Him to suffer hell. For God’s justice had to be satisfied.

Standing there in the water, Jesus drew up all the sins of the world into Himself. Where the people were being washed of their sin, He was absorbing it. He soaked in our sin, our anger, our lies, our failures, our demise. He took it all. Every burden, every weight, every sorrow. He knew what awaited Him in the waters, and He was ready to carry it. Ready to carry it right up onto the cross where He defeated it forever.

Jesus was ready, but the crowd was not. Nothing could have prepared them for what happened next. Nothing could have made them ready for what God had in store. Jesus came up out of the water, and immediately He saw the heavens being torn open. The sky was opened above them. The heavens were laid bare. Jesus had opened heaven for them. He had unlocked the door with His righteousness. He had cleaned them and made them ready for its perfect streets.

The crowd did not know what was happening. They fell to the ground in fear. They looked around frantically trying to understand why the sky was being torn open. Then they saw it. A single white dove. Flying calmly down towards Jesus, who remained standing on the riverbank. Jesus continued to look up into the heavens as the dove landed on His shoulder. He was expecting something. His heart and mind were elsewhere, waiting. And then came the voice of His Father, the voice He was waiting for, "You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." He lowered His gaze in humility. His Father had declared who He was. The Spirit had marked Him as the Christ. He, the Son of God, had been revealed to the world, by those closest to Him.

He stood there for a moment by the river. His earthly ministry had begun. He knew the evil One was waiting for Him. Now He would be tempted, but He would defeat that enemy for us as well.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, you are baptized by God. Jesus did all of these things for you. When He entered the water all those years ago, He was thinking of you personally. He knows you, and He knows you need His righteousness, so He put it in the water for you. He knows your sin, your sorrow, even what you face right now, for He has carried it for you, and He will continue to carry it for you. Let Him. Every day. Immediately when you wake up – say His Name outloud– Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and remember that you are His baptized child. That He absorbed all of your sins in the waters of Holy Baptism. That He has spoken His Name upon you and washed you in His righteousness. He tore open heaven for you. Your heavenly Father now says to you, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The Holy Spirit has descended and now rests on you, and you have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. You are His ambassador. Live your day with His Name on your lips, and His righteousness in your heart. And at times it may seem like a long journey, but take heart, for you are baptized. In Jesus' name, Amen.