

“Rise from the Waters”

Baptism of Christ

Isaiah 42: 1-9; Matthew 3: 13-17

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January 12, 2020

From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: Holy God, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may hear what you have for us this day. Amen

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Aaryn Zhou remembers her first time in the deep end. Aaryn was nine when her family moved from China to Canada. And there was this pool in their apartment complex. And one day her dad was like, let’s try out the pool. And Aaryn’s super excited and her dad is meanwhile thinking, she doesn’t know how to swim. Time to fix that.

And as soon as they get to the pool her dad picks her up, throws her in the deep end. In an interview on This American Life¹, she remembers:

And I start screaming. And I still didn’t really know what was going on. And I was screaming and struggling in the water. And every few seconds I can kind of see above water my dad standing there like looking at me. And I’m screaming and he’s not really reacting.

¹ <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/595/transcript>

And then I see like the other kids and their parents. And they were looking really disapproving.

I remember thinking like how could you not know how to swim? You just have to swim and be OK. Look at all these people staring at you. And look at the look on your dad's face. Just swim.

And then I feel myself sinking and I can only see water around me. And then a few seconds later, I don't know how long, I feel someone grab me. And then I see that it's my dad. And we slowly get out of the pool.

Aaryn says it didn't traumatize her. In fact, it motivated her to try to teach herself to swim.²

Being thrown into the deep end before you know how to swim is more common than you might think.

Here's the thing. It's totally unnecessary to throw a person into the deep end in this way. Because life is going to do that to them anyways.

The first day of a new job. Thrown into the deep end. You have your first child. Thrown into the deep end. Your father has a stroke. Thrown into the deep end. Your child is diagnosed with cancer. Thrown into the deep end. You lose your health insurance. Thrown into the deep end. Your grandson becomes an addict. Thrown into the deep end.

² Rev. Amy Miracle introduced me to This American Life podcast and this story She used this in a sermon, Broad Street Presbyterian Church, Columbus Ohio.

Look around our life and there is something that is big and hard and we can't control it and we can't manage and we are drowning.

Some of us are drowning in debt: credit cards, student loans, mortgages, car loans, personal loans. Most Americans have a combination of these sources of debt. The average American now has about \$38,000 in personal debt, excluding home mortgages. One analyst says, "Despite recognizing that debt is dangerous waters, Americans are jumping in with both feet and struggling to stay afloat."³

So many of us are living in the deep end of the pool, struggling to keep our head above the water.

Whether you were baptized eighty years ago or you will be baptized sometime in the future, the good news is the same.

When you find yourself in the deep end, God will be with you.

That's good news. I say, better yet, avoid the deep end altogether. Better to stay in the shallow end of the pool. Right?

I bet Jesus didn't think twice about going to the Jordan River that day to be baptized by John the Baptizer. I am guessing his family didn't have any idea he was there. All those folks who have done a whole lot of bad things, gather at the river, to be forgiven, cleansed and set free through baptism. Jesus was right there with them. Jesus stood in line. There he was

³ <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/08/20/how-much-debt-americans-have-at-every-age.html>

with everyone else. He never thought about NOT getting in line.

This is where his ministry starts. This act brings life to his ministry.

This is a Sunday when we reflect on our own baptism and reflect on what it means to live a life shaped by baptism. Baptism is one of the best resources we have as we try to move past the expectations of others and into the expectations of God.

Baptism of course is a once in a lifetime event. But living into our baptism--that continues for a lifetime. Every day we can ask the questions--Do I want to live this day shaped by baptism? Will I live into the expectations of God today?

God claims Jesus that day as he came up from the water. God claims Jesus and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." It's an identity claim on his life. Jesus knew who he was and others heard it now too. Knowing who you are is an important part of our identity in Christ.

There is a famous story about Albert Einstein who was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of every passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his trouser pockets.

It wasn't there, so he looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat beside him. He still couldn't find it.

The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.' Einstein nodded appreciatively.

The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket.

The conductor rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry, I know who you are. No problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.'

Einstein looked at him and said, 'Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going.'⁴

To know who you are is one thing. Today reminds us that just as Jesus is beloved, we are too. One aspect of baptism is that it gives public witness to God's saving grace, one's new birth in Christ and incorporation into Christ's body.

Just as important knowing who you are, it's important to know where you are going. Baptism helps us know that as well. At the same time, it is a commissioning for God's mission that we share with Christ. Our baptism in Christ is the place where we see our relationship with everyone else.

⁴ <https://www.quora.com/Did-Albert-Einstein-once-forget-his-address-when-going-home-from-work-by-train>

We are all the same in our baptism.

In other words, what do you do after you come up from the waters of baptism? What then? As a community of faith, who does that call us to be? How will we live out our lives shaped by our baptism?

God will meet us when we rise from the waters of baptism. Every time we celebrate the sacrament, we say “rise from the water of baptism and give glory to God all the days of your life.”

No matter how deep the waters----we not only can get in---we should. That’s where the meaningful stuff is. The good stuff. The hard stuff. Which so often ends up being the good stuff. In the deep waters is where goodness dwells.

What does it look like for you to venture into deep waters? What risk is God calling you to take in the name of a more faithful and joyful life?

Maybe it’s a change of job. Maybe it’s taking on a new volunteer opportunity in the community. Maybe it’s stepping into a church leadership role in our time of transition. Maybe venturing into deeper waters for you would mean to take on one of the great issues of our day – gun violence, immigration, global warming, the threat of war. Maybe it means reaching out to someone who has hurt you. Or maybe the risk that God wants you to take on is to do less –to take your own healing and wholeness seriously.

This is a good time to think about such things. There is this fabulous clean slate quality to this time of year. It doesn't matter what we did or didn't do last year. It's a new year, a fresh start, a new beginning.

What about us as a church community? What risks do we want to take on in the name of a more faithful and joyful church? How can we deepen the mission commitments that we have? What new commitments should we embrace? How can we reach out in evangelism to a new generation of folks who hunger and thirst for God?

These are the right questions to be asking because we follow Jesus. Jesus is a deep end of the pool kind of guy. Who calls us to live a deep end kind of life. Leave the safety of the shallow water, venture into uncharted depths within ourselves. To step outside our comfort zones.

Baptism tells us that each and every one of us is loved and claimed. We are not alone. We feel the drops of water off the branch. We plunge in deep and we rise from the waters of baptism to give glory to God all the days of our life.

Thanks be to God.

Matthew 3:13-17

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

The Word of God for the People of God.