



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 30, 2008
1st Sunday of Advent
1 Peter 3:18-22
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 6:1-3, 5-14, 17-22
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 24
Second Lesson: 1 Peter 3:18-24
Gospel: Mark 13:32-37

Prepared by Saving Water

To face judgment
To stand on the resurrection

We use water a lot to get ready, don't we? I'm guessing some of you used water this morning to get ready to come to church. If you have company coming over, you use water to clean the counter, clean the floors, to clean up. We use water in a lot of these different ways, but we've never used water in the way that God describes it this morning. He talks about how he used water, as we heard in the First Lesson, because he was fed up. He was fed up with man's wickedness and rebellion. And even since he used water to destroy everyone on the earth except for those eight people, it hasn't changed. We are still wicked from birth. But now God uses water in a different way. He used water that saved those eight people in the Ark. He tells us it symbolizes the waters of our baptism, which prepares us and gets us ready for what is coming, because God is coming again to judge the living and the dead is what he tells us.

As we start this new church year, we talk about Christ's coming. He comes in time as our Savior at Bethlehem. He comes to us in Word and Sacrament. He will come again at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead.

This morning God points us to those second two—how God comes to us in Word and Sacrament through the means of grace to get us ready for when he comes again to judge and to save. So as we hear his call to keep watch, to be alert, to be ready, this morning we see how amazing it is that our God himself gets us ready. He prepares us by saving water so that when he comes again to judge, we are ready to face him with a clear conscience it says. Secondly, we see that this can only take place not because of who we are, but it takes place because in our baptism we are connected to Christ's resurrection.

It's interesting in Peter's letter, right before what we just read, he is telling us to always be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have. Then he goes on to talk about more specifically what that hope is. That hope is not us. It's not anything in us. It's not because we are better than someone else. It is not that we are good, or that we do good, or we at least want to do good, or we try harder than someone else. He tells us pretty much straight out what each and every person is. Christ died; the righteous for the unrighteous.

That's you and me—unrighteous. Not kind of righteous, not a little bit more righteous than the guy next to you, not a little bit better or wanting to do good—no, we are just flat out unrighteous. We are wicked. We are born in sin. We don't always like to think that. We don't want to be confronted with the fact that by our own nature we are completely and absolutely sinful and we have nothing to offer to God. We would like to think, "I can offer up to God this or that and God will love me because of who I am and what I do. Look at how I serve him. God must love me." No. No. God loves us because God is love. If God's love for me depended upon me, I don't care how much water you have, I wouldn't have any hope. If God's love for you was dependent upon you, you'd have no hope either.

But because God wants us to have hope, literally confidence, when he comes again to judge, he points us to this saving water of baptism. It doesn't look all that impressive. A little bit of water poured on someone's head. Michaelynn doesn't look all that different in the back now does she than when you brought her up to the front this morning? She looks the same, right?

But in that water, God attaches his promise. His promise is stated very, very clearly for us. Baptism saves you. Not through removal of dirt from the body. It saves you by giving you the pledge of a good conscience toward God. The pledge, literally the down payment, the legal claim of a good conscience toward God—not because of something any of us have done, but because God came to us when we couldn't come to him and he said, "I'm washing away your sins and I'm pouring out my Spirit onto you and I'm baptizing you into Christ—the righteous one who died for you." His righteousness is now yours. His righteousness, his purity, that's what you've been clothed with. That saves you. God has done it all. He has taken away our sins in our baptism. He tells us every time we do sin and say, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. For the sake of Jesus Christ, forgive me of my sins." We are going right back to the waters of our baptism that saved us. So that when Christ comes that last time, as the Gospel told us, when no one is going to be expecting it and we don't know when or how it is going to be, he says we can be ready at all times because we stand in our baptismal grace.

That changes us. It leads us to live for God and not for ourselves. It leads us to take away our trust in ourselves and put our trust in God. Now when guilt climbs all over me and whispers in my ears, "You can't stand before God. Look at what you've done." I don't have to wallow in guilt. I don't have to self-medicate away my guilt. I don't have to find someone else that's more of a wretch than I am so that my guilt is lessened. Now I can say, "I'm a baptized child of God. My sins have been washed away through the life and death of Jesus Christ." I don't have to make excuses because I can face judgment when Christ comes because I have been completely and absolutely forgiven. This isn't just something that's a theoretical or something that's just out there but doesn't apply to daily life. This is your daily life.

In your daily life, you are confronted with your own sins, aren't you? The things you think and say and do that hurt other people, the things that you think and say and do that screw up your own life, and as you face the consequences of your sin, the world

around you tells you to ignore it. The world around you tells you it's no big deal. Or the world around you might tell you you're terrible and no one could ever possibly love you and certainly not God. You understand that you have been baptized into Christ and that God loves you with such an intense love that he died for you while you were unrighteous. That takes away your guilt.

This is where you and I live every day of our lives—between hell and heaven, confronted with our sin. But you and I who have been baptized into Christ can face that truth knowing that we are forgiven children of God. The one who is righteous has made us righteous because he has connected us to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ lived perfectly in our place. Christ died in our place. Christ descended into hell and announced his victory to all those people that mocked Noah as he built the Ark. He didn't give them a second chance to repent. He told them, "You fools! You should have listened. You shouldn't have put off until tomorrow the message Noah was speaking to you that day."

Then he rose again. His resurrection assures us that our sins have been absolutely paid for. That's why a candle is burning next to the font. Because whenever we have a baptism, we are connecting it to resurrection, the Paschal candle, the symbol of Christ's resurrection that burns at baptisms, at funerals and during the Sundays of Easter because it reminds us that we were baptized into his resurrection. When we are buried, we are buried in the confidence of the resurrection. The resurrection is essential in our daily life as Christians.

Even as we begin the church year, we focus on this glorious truth—Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. Because you and I stand in the forgiveness that he has won for us, our sins don't cling to us. The waters of our baptism are like Teflon. The sins now slide off us through faith in Christ. We are forgiven. We have been prepared by saving water, and we can face the judgment when Christ returns.