

Water and Spirit

A sermon preached at Second Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Trinity Sunday, May 25, 1997. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29. 35b; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." Let's assume that Jesus knew that Nicodemus came to him precisely because he had a longing to enter the kingdom of God. Let's further assume that all of us - or at least the best part of us - also wants, more than anything else, to enter the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God. The Kingdom spoken of by the Old Testament prophets where the lion would lie next to the lamb and swords be beaten into plowshares. The Kingdom Jesus proclaimed was at hand and called people to repent in anticipation of its coming. The Kingdom of God - a kingdom ruled by the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ. A kingdom where God's will is done and his commandments gladly obeyed. A kingdom where everybody loves the Lord with all their heart, soul, strength and mind and where everybody loves their neighbor as themselves. This is the kingdom we all desire down deep. But Jesus says. "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."

The words of Jesus evoke many other images from the Bible that unite water and spirit. The words remind us of the opening words of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Water and Spirit brought forth all of

creation. And through water and the Spirit we are made new creations in Christ through baptism.

The words of Jesus also remind us of the waters of the Red Sea over which the wind or Spirit of God blew, dividing the waters so that God's children could escape from slavery in Egypt and enter into new life in God's promise land. And this morning we'll pray for the wind of God to blow over the water in the font to lead Elizabeth Rose along with her parents, Joseph and Sharon, out of slavery to this world's values and into the freedom of God's kingdom.

The words of Jesus also remind us of the waters of the Jordan river where Jesus was baptized. The heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove and rested on Jesus and the voice of God said, "This is my beloved son." This morning I'll pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit to come down upon Elizabeth Rose and say to her, "You are my beloved daughter."

Surely Jesus had in mind these biblical images of creation, of the Red Sea deliverance, and of his own baptism when he said to Nicodemus, "You must be born of water and the Spirit." With those words of Jesus in mind look at the baptismal font filled with water. The water in the font reminds us of the words of Jesus. "No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."

Water... we wash with water to remove our filth and grime and dirt. We drink water to quench our thirst. The waters of baptism remind us that Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty

come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink." The waters also remind us of what St. Paul wrote, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word." Or again where he writes, "God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

Baptism is the sign that God has saved us, not because of anything we've done or failed to do, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. That means that all of us who've been baptized are debtors. We're indebted to God the Father who claims us as his own children. We're indebted to God the Son who came to us in the person of Jesus Christ to take upon himself our sin and judgment. And we're indebted to the Holy Spirit who breathes new life into us and who is the source of our longing to know God, to love God and to serve God in his kingdom of God.

May God give to each one of us a longing to enter his kingdom. "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."