

**Sermon for Baptism of Our Lord—Year C 2019**  
*Redeemed, Precious, Beloved*

A pastor friend of mine tells this story about a family she knows.  
It seems a young boy had been home all day with his mom.  
And he had been a terror the whole day.  
With each incident, his mother would tell him,  
“Just wait until your father gets home!”  
Evening came and eventually his dad arrived home from work.  
The young boy’s mom began telling his dad about his bad behavior.  
The dad looked at his son but before he even had a chance to say  
anything, the young boy cried out,  
“You can’t touch me! I’ve been baptized!”

Matthew—the soon-to-be baptized infant boy—  
is a little young to try that one out . . .  
but maybe his older brother Tommy will—excuse the pun—  
“test the waters out” to see how it works with his mom and dad.

If only it were that simple or easy or clear.  
If only when troubles and sorrows come  
we could shout out “You can’t touch me! I’ve been baptized!”  
If only we could exclaim these words in the face of the chances and  
changes of life, “You can’t touch me! I’ve been baptized!”  
and all the pains and trials of living in the world  
would magically evaporate—  
as if we were Harry Potter shouting the defensive spell “expelliarmous!”

But, no baptism isn’t a defensive spell.  
Despite my baptism, I have, like every one of us, suffered sorrows and  
losses of life, encountered difficulties and struggles,  
have had to face changes and chances of life  
I would rather have avoided.  
And despite his baptism that little boy in the story  
still went to a time-out.

And yet he spoke a deep truth.  
He is absolutely right—in a particular way he is untouchable.  
At some level that little boy knew that his existence,  
his identity, and value are not limited to time and space,  
or to the things he has done or left undone.  
He knows himself to be more than his biological existence.  
He knows himself as precious, redeemed and beloved.  
He knows the gift of baptism.

Baptism does not eliminate our difficulties, fix all our problems,  
take away the pain, or change the circumstances of our lives.  
It is not a defensive spell or one-way ticket out of trouble.  
Instead it changes us and offers a way through those difficulties,  
sorrows, problems and circumstances, and,  
ultimately a way through death.  
Baptism transcends our biological existence  
and offers us a vision of life as it might be.  
Baptism offers us a new way of being—  
because in baptism we called and claimed  
to be Christ's own.

The waters of baptism will soon glisten on Matthew's head  
and as they do, we each need to know a few things  
about what baptism is and means.  
First baptism is a once for life event  
and yet, paradoxically, it is a journey, a journey of faith.  
No matter how old you are when you are baptized,  
it is God who has claimed and chosen you—  
God has named you as God's own.  
We had about as much chance of choosing our God  
as we did choosing our parents.  
What a great mystery this is!  
That God breaks open the heavens to claim us in water and the word.

Baptism means that the promises of God are forever bound to us.

Here's the thing—we may not be able to escape the troubles of the world but we can never outrun or escape the promises of God. These promises will seek us out and bring us new life as we die to sin and are raised to new life again and again in our baptismal journey.

Being baptized means that we live a life of *metanoia*—which is a Greek word for changing your thinking, your perspective. Another word for *metanoia* is repentance. When you begin to think you have all the answers, when you think you've figured it all out—that's when the Spirit stirs things up and urges us toward *metanoia*—towards repentance so there is the hope of new thinking, new acting, new life—which you simply don't get when you think you are always right about something. There's always more insight to be gained; there is always more to understand and know.

And if you want to grow in your baptismal identity, then it's a salutary thing to be wrong—Because being Christian means that we get to be wrong sometimes and die to our ideas, our pride, our despair and then re-born to new life in Christ. If we want to grow in faith, hope and love then we need to be willing to be wrong and admit that we are wrong so that we might know deeply the grace of God which makes all things new.

So the baptismal journey is a journey that takes us on a path to which we do not know the ending . . . but as one of our prayers reminds us, all we know is that God's hand is leading us and guiding us. One of those promises of God's Isaiah tells us is that we will not pass through the waters and fires of life alone, God will be with us—because we are precious in God's sight.

Just image, that all of this comes from water and the word of God!  
Every time in our lives when we encounter water—  
this common substance surrounding land and comprising our bodies—  
whenever we drink it in,  
or dive in a pool,  
or wade in a stream  
or splash in the ocean  
or play in the rain—

I hope you experience the wonder of God's promises all around you.  
Water in our lives should always be a reminder of the promises of God.  
Promises of new life.  
Promises that God is with us.  
Promises that there is more than this life.  
More than this life and yet the eternal is always contained in the present.  
Yes, look at water and remember that these promises are for the  
restoration of all creation.

When you encounter water,  
This most common of substances,  
be reminded of God who is so imminent, so present  
as to be the host of a meal in which you and all who hunger are called.

Most of all, when you encounter water,  
remember the words that were spoken over Jesus at his baptism:  
*You are my child, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.*  
Jesus' baptism is for our sake and salvation.  
His baptism makes ours possible.  
The water of baptism does not sanctify Jesus.  
No Jesus sanctifies the water of baptism.  
The water that once drowned now sanctified water that gives life.

We are only baptized once, as I said before.  
Yet throughout our life we return to the waters of baptism.  
Daily we return to the baptismal waters  
through living our baptismal vows.

We confess our faith in God—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier—  
because God first believed in and chose us.

We continue in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles,  
in the breaking of the bread,  
and in prayer because the Holy Spirit  
has descended upon and filled us.

We persevere in resisting evil,  
and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord  
because the heavens have been opened to us,  
we have seen our true home.

We proclaim in word and in deed the good news of God in Christ  
because we have heard the voice from heaven declare us beloved,  
precious and redeemed children.

We seek and serve Christ in all persons,  
loving our neighbor as ourselves;  
striving for justice, peace, and dignity for every human being  
because that is how God has treated us  
and how could we do less for another one of God's children.

Sometimes our own body provides the waters of baptism in our tears.  
A saint of the early church spoke of our eyes as two baptismal fonts.  
Tears are the body's own baptismal waters  
that can cleanse, heal, and renew life.

Throughout our lives, there are circumstances,  
things done and left undone,  
ups and downs, joys and sorrows  
that push us back to the waters of baptism.

We return in order to again be immersed into the open heavens,  
to be bathed by God's breath, the Holy Spirit,  
and to let the name "beloved" wash over us.

This is a word from God that claims you as God's own.  
And nothing and no one else gets to tell you who you are.  
Nothing. You are redeemed, you are precious and you are beloved.

Whenever you feel as though your needs are too great.  
When you feel that there must be more to life than this—  
when it seems like you hunger for more justice,  
more meaning,  
more connection,  
know that you are right to long for these things  
because God has placed this need in you.  
Lean into this longing because it is a longing  
for the One who has called you.

And now may we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear.  
And, Matthew --- your adventure of faith is about to begin!