

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

For the next 5 weeks, Pr. Paul and I are going to use a Lenten Bible series called, “Water For Your Soul” as an inspiration for our sermons.

Pastor Glenn L. Borreson, an ELCA pastor from Holmen, Wisconsin, has suggested sermon titles and Bible readings for the 5 weeks of Lent... based on his book, Water For Your Soul: Living in Baptism Every

Day.

The suggested sermon titles all begin with, “The Baptismal Plunge w/ Christ Who...”

Today’s title is “The Baptismal Plunge w/ Christ Who Gives Us the Good Life.”

The next four weeks are...

“Who Is One to Count On,” “Who Connects Us to People,”

“Who Helps Us to Change,” and “Who Moves Us into the World.”

In our reading today, we hear that God, by raising Jesus from the dead, has mercifully given us a new birth, a living hope, and an inheritance.

Let’s start with the new birth.

This Lenten season, we’re going to be talking a lot about birthdays.

Specifically, we’re referring to the birthday that changed everything: the day you were baptized.

What is baptism? Baptism, in simplest terms, is Water and Word.

The Word is the reading of scriptures but why water? What’s so special about water?

Well, on one hand, it’s the most ordinary element on earth:

71% of the earth’s surface is covered by water.

But most of this is salt water: only 1% is drinkable.

There simply is no more precious commodity on the earth:

all of life is dependent on this 1%.

In baptism, God gives us life/gives it abundantly, freely w/o any deserving on our part.

What better way to demonstrate this than to pour water on the head of an infant...

and have it witnessed by God's children,
none of whom have lived long enough to have earned enough
grace...

or even understand what is happening to them?

So now you see why I pour from a shell rather than sprinkle the water...

and why I like to bring the children up to witness this miracle of God's doing not ours.

I said that, by raising Jesus from the dead,

God has given us a new birth, a living hope, and an inheritance.

Baptism is a living hope: it isn't something we do as infants and then just forget about.

It's more than just kid's stuff!

At the end of each chapter of his book, Pastor Borrenson prints an appropriate haiku.

Here's his 1st one: splashing in the font; everyone completely soaked; God's gone wild

In the same way that we need water every day to live and grow,
we need the water of baptism every day in order for the soul to survive & thrive.

We are given so much of God's love and grace in our baptism...

that it takes a lifetime to fully appreciate what we have received.

Because of our baptisms, we are not only children of God, we are children of hope.

No baptized Christian ever need fear tomorrow or the end of time.

They are ours; they are our inheritance.

Pastor Borrenson tells the story of reading a headline in the Holmen newspaper:

"Unclaimed Money! It May Belong to You!"

Unfortunately, as he read down the list of names...

of those who had money left to them without their knowledge,

his name was conspicuously absent. Drat!

Baptism is just such an inheritance waiting for us to claim it.

But we ignore it, thinking it a quaint, charming ceremony and nothing more;

we reduce it to merely an initiation into heaven,
ignoring its implications for us today;

and we think of it as an interruption in the service...
rather than seeing how essential it is in the life of our

community:

We have two kinds of New Member Services in this church:

the kind when we transfer families from other places, and baptisms.

The first is a delight; the second, is essential to who we are.

The earliest Christians read the Word, exchanged a Christian greeting,
communed and baptized.

That was pretty much it; that's pretty much all we're about today.

Baptism is an inheritance: Christ left everything to you!

John 16:15 (NIV) Jesus said, "All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is
why...

I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."

What an incredible inheritance! All that was the Father's passed to the

Son;

and all that was the Son's will be passed to us through the Spirit.

What gifts are to be passed down?

First, presence...not presents, like party presents but presence as in...

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among
them."

(Matthew 18:20)

Christ's presence brings love, healing, and union.

Christian love (agape) is so much more than the cheap imitation love...

we try to pawn off on each other.

Conditional human love runs this way: "I'll love you if..."

...to do so meets my current needs, it doesn't interfere with my desires,

I can't find someone better, it doesn't cost too much,

I receive more than what I give, I don't need to commit.

Agape love, the unconditional love of God, states that "I'll love you even if..."

...you think you don't need me, you have betrayed me before,

you love someone or something else more,

my commitment to you is unreturned and it costs me my life.

Agape love is so pure that we are not capable of it, and yet Christ gives it freely,
as a gift, an inheritance through his presence in our lives.

Christ's presence also brings healing: we've covered this ground before,

but we always need to remember the distinction b/t healing and a cure.

God does continue to cure illness, and it is a wondrous thing to behold!

But greater still is the gift of healing b/c those who are cured get sick again
eventually.

We are all suffering from a terminal disease called life: we will all die from it.

Lazarus was raised but returned to the grave at another time. Those who are healed by Christ's presence in their lives, however, will feel pain but not misery, sadness but not defeat, death but not suffering

Finally, Christ's presence brings union.

We all feel alienation, we all feel loneliness, we all turn out the lights... and feel ourselves alone even if someone sleeps beside us.

There is an empty space inside us that only Christ can fill.

Christ's presence in our lives brings love, healing, and union: the best birthday presents of all!

But Christ's presence is only one of the gifts of our inheritance.

We have also inherited the Word, the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures... the Living Word that continues to speak to our lives and draws us nearer to God..

every time we pick it up.

The great secret the "Bible Code" people keep trying to decipher with numbers is this:

the Bible stories are our stories.

Martin Luther's Flood Prayer (p. 230 *ELW*) that Lutherans pray at baptism...

unites water w/ the History of the Jewish people, with our history.

We are the people of Israel lost in the Wilderness, always turning... our backs on the God who faithfully led us through the sea.

Our inheritance also includes the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit.

How do we say it at baptism? "Sustain this child with the gift of the Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom/understanding, counsel/might, knowledge, fear/Lord, joy."

These gifts were given to most of us before we even understood the words: the Spirit was at work in us before we even knew there was a Holy

Spirit!

Finally, it is the community of Christ, the church, that reminds people of their inheritance,

the gift that no one deserves: one last haiku...

named to get it all; he wasn't deserving, they whispered; and they were right.