

January 11, 2015 Genesis 1: 1–5 Mark 1: 9–11

Genesis 1: 1–5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1: 9–11

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

If, by the end of this sermon, you don't either feel the urge to get a drink...or go to the bathroom...then I'm not doing my job – because today's message is all about...the WATER. Gallons of it. Deep, bountiful, blessed water. The substance from which creation emerged. The stuff that surrounds us in utero. The liquid that makes up every cell of our body. It is essential to life....and we're advised to drink 8 8 oz glasses of the stuff every day. I confess I don't...

Some time ago, I had the luxury of a few minutes to just linger in a local drugstore. I found that there is a lot to be learned by doing so. Once I put on my strong reading glasses I discovered that I could actually read some of the fine print posted next to the drug displays. I was amazed to learn that drinking water actually helps to reduce many types of pain. Not water with Advil. Just plain water! Evidently our joints cry out for it. Our tissues protest when they are deprived of it. And we do well to keep hydrated.

Water. We hurt when we don't get enough of it. Perhaps it's no surprise that a fundamental act of our Christian faith involves water – that Jesus was submerged and then emerged...from the river Jordan, fully drenched, fully God, fully man, and full of truth and grace. The same God who

fashioned the world from an abyss of water, kicks off the earthly mission of the Son of God...in water.

It seems as though humanity has always been fascinated with water. What's the first thing we look for on another planet. It's not magnesium or iron or even gold. It's water. All those eggheads at NASA are in fits of rapture when it looks as though the Mars buggy may have discovered evidence of water. Frozen water...and very OLD water...but water nonetheless. The NASA folks are popping their little pocket protectors over the prospect!

Perhaps you and I have a hard time remembering our baptism. That's one of the drawbacks of practicing infant baptism. It's hard to recall it. But that's also the gift of every subsequent baptism we participate in: we are re-enacting...our own baptism. In full immersion baptism...there IS a quality of self-surrender that we lose in the sprinkling ritual. To be dunked fully underwater at the hands of someone else can be frightening...but it also speaks boldly of utterly turning over our power...our LIFE...to someone else, namely God.

William Willimon, a teacher and preacher at Duke Divinity School, says that caring for creation "is the responsibility of the baptized." Like water, land, air & everything else, we are, after all, created by God. The world is not ours. We have no DEED to the earth. I'd hate to READ it if there WAS one. We're but temporary residents. Ps.24 reads: "The earth is Yours, O Giver of Life, in all its fullness and glory, the world and all those who dwell therein; for You have founded it upon the seas, and est'ed it upon the rivers."

And so we are stewards OF it. If you've ever visited a campsite where Boy Scouts had previously camped, you may have witnessed a shining example of stewardship: "leave it better than you found it." Chances are very good that such a campsite will have a fire laid and ready to light, grounds well tidied, and not a shred of trash to be found.

Oh, that we could imitate the Scouts on a grand scale. To leave the entire planet better than we found it, so that the little ones whom we baptize up here at the baptismal font...these meek ones who stand to inherit the earth...would inherit an earth worth HAVING – GREENER, FRESHER, MORE abundant than it was before.

It won't happen by staying the course – By not making waves – by acceding to the wishes of those bent on profiting at the expense of our soil, air or water.

Do you know what the primary EXPENSE is associated with putting a conservation easement on a piece of property? It's amassing the necessary funds to DEFEND the easement from all future challenges, forever! Because a conservation easement is a delicious TARGET. It WILL be challenged. As the expression goes, land's a solid investment: they're not making any MORE of it. So there will always be those who want to Unprotect..protected land.

No more land is being created...except for select volcanic islands. But, by and large, it's a pretty static commodity. But that doesn't mean God isn't CREATING. God is forever creating. That's what God does. Continually fashioning things

like love, community, and vision. And, I believe, God is forever igniting within us the spark of compassion for one another AND for the earth. I'm counting on it.

Martin Copenhaver put it wonderfully: "God doesn't create as a painter creates a painting. God creates more like a cellist creating a sonata. If God were ever to stop creating, creation would cease." God is at it 24/7!! And I thought playing for the entire turkey dinner was a long gig!

The point is that God is ever at work. And we...empowered by that tireless Spirit of goodness and truth...are called upon to continually safeguard God's creation. Just in my little corner of the world, I can vouch for the nearly endless task of cleaning up County Road 12. I don't know who is planting all those beer and soda cans along the road, but I can attest to a bumper crop! Free for the picking. And, incidentally, fetching 5 cents each at Wegman's!!

Our baptism calls us to repent. To turn around. Maybe to bend down...and pick up. To take another look...to try something new and blessed. Continually reforming, ever...and only...with help of the Holy Spirit. Take a tip from our SKIN: our skin is forever sloughing off old skin and creating new. Same with our blood cells. I'm not sure what happen to hair follicles. That's an issue I need to take up with God...when the time comes. No rush.

Out of the water came Creation the first time. And out of water came Re-creation through Jesus Christ. We are born and re-born of water. No wonder we are drawn to it.

I came across a story about someone who had never seen an automatic drinking fountain before. He couldn't figure out how to make it work. It had no tap, no buttons to press. He became very frustrated. He was about to turn away when somebody pointed out to him a little sign on the bottom of the fountain that simply said, "Stoop, and drink."

When he stooped over he discovered that an electric eye detected his presence and the water automatically came flowing out. He needed to bow to receive the water. More than a cute little story, it just might suggest our proper attitude toward the water of life.

Recall, if you will, standing at the seashore looking at those enormous breakers coming in, one after another, in endless succession. The utter AWE of the moment can bring us to our knees. And if that doesn't do it...wade out into the ocean about 30 feet. THAT'LL bring us to our knees!

CDGA Lake contains 440 billion gallons of water. Honeoye boasts another 10 billion. The life blood of our farms, communities, homes, and bodies. What we do with it...what we do TO it...matters - to us, to our grandchildren, to God!

One of our baptismal assignments is to care for the water from which we all emerge. To keep it pure. To take it in. To be blessed by it.....After giving a man a full medical examination, the doctor explained his Rx as he wrote it out.

"Take the green pill with a glass of water when you get up. Take the blue pill with a glass of water after lunch. Then just

before going to bed, take the red pill with another glass of water."

"Exactly what is my problem, Doctor?" the man asked.

"You're not drinking enough water." At this threshold to a new year, might we reaffirm our baptismal vows, and be willing to immerse ourselves in our God-given task to care for the water of life, in all its forms? That's my hope. Amen.