

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – October 8 & 9, 2017
In Celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Our sermon today is based on the three Scripture lessons for today:

2 Kings 5:1-3, 9-14; Romans 6:1-4 and John 3:1-6.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, heirs of the Reformation

What do you see? Of course, this is some water. What can water do? Water can quench our thirst. Water keeps us healthy so that we do not dry out. Water makes plants grow. Water can make us clean. Water can cool us off when we are hot. Water can give us a place to play. Water gives us a place to fish. When we get into deeper water, it holds us up so we can float. Water can wash away rock, sand, dirt, and other items in nature. Flood waters can destroy things.

By itself, water can do some pretty amazing things. But when you add the power of God's Word to water – then miraculous things happen as we learned from our Scripture lessons today.

Naaman, the Syrian commander, was a highly respected military leader and had the respect of his king. But he had something else too—the dreaded and incurable skin disease of leprosy. To protect others from the highly contagious disease, Naaman would be shut away from his family and friends, away from his military service and from society. He would be an outcast, or rather he would have been an outcast, except for the advice of a captive Israelite slave girl. She knew there was a prophet of God in her homeland, in Samaria, who could cure the commander of his disease.

Naaman probably felt he was humbling himself quite a bit to ask a favor from a foreign prophet, an enemy of Syria. But the situation only went downhill from there. When Naaman arrived at Elisha's door, the prophet refused even to meet the Syrian commander face to face. He merely sent a message by way of a servant: Wash seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman was not impressed. He had expected some flash and dazzle, some arm-waving and calling on the name of Israel's God. Instead he was told to wash seven times—not in some clean, crystal fountain flowing through in a temple or even in the rivers of his own land—but in some filthy river in the land of his enemies! It was too much. It was an outrage. Still, the commander's faithful servants managed to convince their master to at least give it a try, and so he did. Naaman washed himself seven times in the Jordan River and at the seventh dip in the water, he rose up cleansed and healed, his skin like that of a little child.

Most of us would like to see a few miracles of the kind that Naaman hoped to see—flashy, spectacular, obvious miracles that would provide us with healing from illness, rescue from financial problems and solutions for employment issues and family troubles. It is true that God can work that way, and he sometimes he does provide those kinds of miracles, but not always. Often his miracles are more like the one that happened for Naaman, quiet, ordinary and not so obviously spectacular, but still very much a miracle.

In a miracle that we will soon celebrate, God himself took on human flesh in the womb of a virgin. It was a quiet miracle, unnoticed by many people, although certainly noticed by those most closely involved! We will sing about the quiet miracle in the “Little Town of Bethlehem,” the miracle that came to pass on that “Silent Night.” It was quiet, a birth probably unnoticed in

Bethlehem, at least unnoticed until it was announced and celebrated by countless angels and the news of it was shared by astonished shepherds. The Child of Bethlehem, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, would grow up to carry out quiet and gentle miracles of healing and feeding the hungry, restoring sight and strength and casting out demons. The miracles were sometimes quiet but always astonishing, and they drew crowds.

Finally, the greatest miracle of all would take place at a cross outside of Jerusalem and at an empty tomb not far away. Jesus carried our sins in his own body to the cross. He suffered the penalty of death that we have earned for ourselves by our sins. His body was taken down from the cross and sealed in a guarded tomb. His followers by that point had pretty much given up on any idea of a miracle. The miracle-working Lord they loved was dead and they expected nothing more. But on the third day after his death, an astonishing, unheard-of miracle took place. An angel rolled away the stone to reveal an empty tomb. Jesus had risen from the dead! He was alive, in the flesh, and he appeared to many eyewitnesses. It was the most astonishing miracle of all, and it is a miracle that is ours to share.

Jesus has given us this command: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all things.

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus spoke to a man named Nicodemus about a miracle that the well-educated Pharisee found impossible to understand. Jesus said that to enter the kingdom of God, one must be born again. What did that mean? Could an adult enter his mother's womb again and be born a second time? That's impossible! But that is exactly the kind of miracle at which God excels. He does the impossible—in this case, a rebirth of water and the Spirit.

It is a miracle that has happened here, in this church, at that baptismal font, many times. There is no crystal fountain, no mighty river, no special water shipped in from the Himalayas, just ordinary water joined to the Word of our Lord Jesus: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In that quiet, nearly unnoticed miracle, the Holy Spirit is at work as the child or adult is joined to Christ Jesus, participates in his death and burial, and is raised to new life.

Just as Naaman the Syrian was washed clean in the Jordan River, each newly baptized son or daughter of God is washed clean, not of leprosy, but of the stain of sin. Holy Scripture says of our Baptism: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). In the quiet miracle of Baptism, you are born again into a right relationship with God, born again as an heir of salvation. You were born again to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, to walk in love and service to others as he walked, to walk in sure and certain steps through a new life that extends into eternity, to walk in the forgiveness that is yours through Jesus' death and resurrection. Our Epistle lesson reminded us that we have been joined to Christ's death in our baptism and that just as Christ was raised from the dead so we too have been given a new life. Dear friends, that's the word working through the water!

More than 500 years ago, a baby boy, the son of Hans and Margaret Luther, was made a child of God and an heir of salvation. He was baptized on November 11 in 1483, the day after his birth. It was the church festival day to celebrate the life of St. Martin, so the baby was named Martin. As little Martin Luther grew up in his Christian home, he learned about the God and Savior who already knew the work this newborn son of the kingdom would one day do in service of the

Gospel. After many years and much study of Holy Scripture, Martin would come to know and treasure the salvation that became his on the day of his baptism.

Whenever sin and Satan tempted him, or when Satan tried to frighten him into thinking his sins could not be forgiven, Martin would say, “I am baptized!” It was not a long academic discourse, but just a few words, the simple, confident statement of a miraculous truth: “I am baptized!” Martin was joined to Christ, his sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb of God. He belonged to Jesus, and Jesus would not let go of him.

It is a statement of confident hope that you can use too. When you are tempted, when Satan the accuser tries to make you think that your sins are too great to be forgiven, when the fears and trials of life make you wonder if God really does love you, you can say, “I am baptized!” You have been joined to Christ. You were crucified with him and buried with him. When he rose from the dead, he pulled you up from death right along with him to walk in the new resurrection life that is yours by faith in his name. You can say, “I am baptized! God sent his Son to die on the cross for me. My sins are forgiven, washed away in the blood of Jesus. I am adopted into God’s household as his precious child. I have already died with Christ and I have been raised to live forever with him. I am!” Amen.

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