

St. Andrew's Sermons
The Rev. John Rohrs
January 9, 2021

I've never been to the Holy Land, but it's on my bucket list, and one of the many sights I'd love to see is the Jordan River. Scripture tells us it's where Jesus was baptized, and there'd be something magical about stepping into the same water.

The problem is I've heard it's really calm and narrow – more like a stream – and that just doesn't fit my mental image. I want it to be a big rushing river. When I hear today's gospel story, I picture Jesus wading out into the waves, having to dig his feet into the sand so the water doesn't carry him away. I want it to seem risky or dangerous even because to me that's a better reflection of what it's all about. We're not baptized into an imaginary life of ease; we're baptized into the real world, where waves crash and currents sweep us away.

Think about all that we've lived through the last two years. An on-going pandemic, intense political conflict, social upheaval. It's a harrowing time to be alive. In moments like this, it can be hard to navigate the currents, hard to stay above water, hard to know where to stand. As Christians, our moral and spiritual compass is the baptismal covenant. That's intended to be the foundation of our lives; it's how we find our way amidst all the divisions and decisions of these days. That's how we know where to plant our feet and stand firm – by letting those promises guide our hearts and point us in the direction of God, in the direction of love.

That's why in the season of Advent we started reciting the Baptismal Covenant each week following the sermon. It's more engaging than the Nicene Creed. It includes much of the same language but it adds those final questions that bring it into the context of our lives. Will we continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship and prayer? Will we resist evil and repent? Will we proclaim the good news of Christ? Will we seek and serve and love our neighbors as ourselves? Will we strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Those are the promises we make, and they're not easy. They're not supposed to be easy because they represent a deep commitment to a new way of life. I love our traditions in the Episcopal Church, but I've said before that I wish we did full immersion baptism rather than the sprinkling at the font. The baptismal image in Scripture is one of dying and rising again. When John dunked Jesus under the water, Jesus was becoming something new, taking upon himself the image and the dream of God. The same is true for us.

It sounds a little scary, maybe, this language of dying and rising, but think of it as a transformation. And our gospel reminds us that it comes with a blessing. The heavens opened, Luke says, and God named Jesus beloved. This transformed life is a life of love, a life infused with the presence and promise of God. And we don't journey alone. In baptism we are joined with one another, supporting and sustaining each other in faith. And flowing through each of us is the very breath and voice of God, speaking the only words we ever need to hear. We are God's beloved children, every one. As the waters rage around us, this is who we are and where we stand. We are beloved. We are made for love. Amen.