

Shaping A Nation - Through Death To Life

Bible Reading:
Exodus 13:17-14:31

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READ EXODUS 13:17-14:31, P.60 (OT)

I'd like to ask you to imagine.

Imagine if you can what it would have been like to be part of the newly liberated nation of Israel. You've just been released from centuries of slavery and have begun the journey to freedom in a new country. For you and for your children – a future!
Eagerly you set out.

And then the terror of seeing the Egyptian army come from behind.
The rumble of the chariot wheels.
The crying of Israelite children.

Then the enormous pillar of cloud, glowing like fire at night, moves between you and those who have come to destroy you.
Out goes the hand of Moses.
And you travel across a miracle path - you and your family.

God's hand clears a path between the waves.
You are brought safely through.
And the army - when they try it, they are totally wiped out.
God reached out His hand that you may live.
God lowered His hand against your enemy.

As an ancient Hebrew raised with the stories of God, you may well recall and believe that you have, in some way, just gone through the story of Creation all over again.
Creation, as told in the book of *Genesis*, where there was a primal, chaotic soup over which brooded the Spirit of God. That powerful Spirit separated water from swirling water, creating places of dry ground where things could grow and live. Here at the Red Sea, it was that same Spirit power of God who parted and piled up the swirling waters of the great sea, creating dry ground across which Israel could walk and live.
And the Spirit then drew back His power, allowing the water to swirl back and create chaos for the pursuing enemy army. Life, freedom and hope were given as a miraculous, created gift from God to Israel.
With the Spirit's power, there is life.
When that power withdraws, there is only death.

As an ancient Hebrew raised with the stories of God, you may also recall and believe that you have, in some way, just relived the experience of Noah - old Noah, the believer who, the ancient story says, was brought safely through a deluge of water.
God's hand cleared a safe space for him through the flood, and gave him a whole new beginning for life.

Yes, worshippers at Calvin, if you can imagine yourself as one of these ancient Hebrews you may well be realizing just about now,
now as you stand on the bank of the Red Sea,
you may well be realizing just about now that you were as good as dead just a little while ago -
but having been brought through the judgement water, now you live.

Thanks be to God for life!!

It is this great historical event that the Christian Church looks back to when it celebrates the sacrament of Holy Baptism. You may have noticed that the baptism ceremony, and the baptismal prayer that we used earlier even referenced the events of Creation and Noah.

We baptize these two little new members in the Church of Jesus Christ, we celebrate God's miracle creation of life, His gift to the families and to us all, through the highly symbolic ceremony of water.

Water - we are in many ways so dependent upon water for life.
Water must be taken in or else, in a just a few short days, we die.
Water nourishes.

Water is life.
Just ask ancient Israel.

Water can also be very dangerous.
Ask the survivors of Katrina.
Just ask the ancient Egyptian army.

Death and life - together in water.

Those two references come together also in Baptism, the ceremony mandated by Jesus as the holy rite of entrance into His Church.

Baptism - it's more than just a rite of passage.

It's more than just the naming of a baby.

As we enact it here today, it is applying the waters of death and life to the bodies of these little children

It is the holy act of declaring these lives alive in the new life of God, the new life that comes as a gift to us through Jesus Christ, the new life of heaven, eternal life.

Jesus said to his followers, "As you bring people into my community of faith, baptize them." That's the command of Matthew 28 which we read at the beginning of the baptism event.

In the very early missionary days of the Church, it would involve going to a river, and getting down into the river.

Down into the river, just like Israel went down.

Down into the river as a person facing death.

And then

- after either being dunked,

- or having water from that river poured on your head, as shown in this ancient

Mosaic from about 500AD -

then coming back up out of the river as a person with a new life.



When people were converted to faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized, it was a sign that their life was beginning again. They've entered an entirely re-created existence.

They belong to the community which is alive on the other side of the river;

the community given a whole new life where it seemed that only death was waiting for them;

the community that was on its way to eternal death, but was brought through to

eternal life - new life - the gift of life by Jesus Christ.

Baptism is the outer symbol

- the confirming sacred sign, the **sacrament** -
of that transition.

Baptism -

Instituted by Jesus, it has served as the entrance rite into the Christian Church ever since.

Baptism -

Not just a nice social custom.

But a sign and seal of faith.

a sign and seal of a person's submitting their life to Jesus Christ.

Baptism says -

Without God's intervention the ancient Israelites would have been dead.

Without God's intervention I would have also been headed for certain death - eternal darkness and death.

But God did intervene for Israel. He gave them life.
God intervened for me, too. He sent Jesus.
And through Jesus I now have life.
meaning filled life here.
eternal life afterwards.

That's what Baptism says.

St. Paul picks up that idea in the New Testament book of Colossians when, in chapter 2 verse 12 he writes:

When you were buried with Him in baptism, you were also raised with Him through faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Buried with Christ. Down in the water.
Raised with Christ. Up from the water.

Buried with Christ. Down to certain death.
Raised with Christ. Up to eternal life.

Friends, this is the most basic of all Christian teaching.

It's the teaching of the Cross- the Bible's teaching that Jesus died to carry the punishment and condemnation which properly belongs to all human beings.

He died.
Down.

He was buried into a tomb, from which no one expected him to emerge.

No more than Israel expected they could emerge from being trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea.

Down.
There Jesus died in our place.

But then - great miracle!

Greater yet than the miracle at the Red Sea.
When death seemed to have the last word - a miracle of life!
A path is carved through death to life on the other side.

Which is the account
miracle-filled and historically true account
of Easter - the Resurrection of Jesus.

Death did not have the last word over Jesus.

The God who pried apart the water of the Red Sea,

creating a path of life for Israel to escape through safely to the other side where the Egyptian army could never touch them again,

is the same God who pried the bars of death's prison apart so that Jesus could escape through to the other side, to life, to eternal life where death could never touch him again.

Jesus returned to life -

- full and complete life.
- death was destroyed.

The simple, and yet profound message of Christianity

is that all who surrender their lives to Jesus
will be carried by the hand of God along that same path
down into death
and up into eternal life.

Death will NOT have the last word in the life of a believer in Jesus.
Nor more than Egypt had the last word in Israel's life.

Baptism is the mark that reminds every believer of that.
 I've been baptised.
 I've been touched by the waters.
 I've been marked for eternal life.

Understand -

It is not the water that brings the life.
 Jesus gives the life, which we receive by believing faith in Him.
 The water of baptism is the **outer** sign of that **inner** reality.

That's true for adults who believe and are baptized.
 It's equally true for young babies and children of parents who believe.
 Which is why we apply the water of baptism to them, too.
 The Bible slaps a label on the heart and soul of every child of believing parents. The label is this -
HOLY.
 That's the word St.Paul gives to believers' children in 1 Cor 7:14.

HOLY - a word that means, "set apart, different, special"
 HOLY children are children that are different, that are special, that are set apart by God as His own.
 And so the waters of baptism,
 waters of grace
 waters of new life
 are applied to them, too, just as they are to the parents.

And parents, together with the Church, pledge to remind these children, as they continue to remind themselves, of this great event.

And so we said during our baptismal ceremony -
REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM.

Remember who you are.
 People of the holy water.
 People of the new life.
 People brought from death to life.

Remember - and live like it!!
 Live a new life.
 Live a clean life.

As water touches and cleans us on the outside, remember the blood of Jesus, which touches and cleans our spirits on the inside.

Ancient Israel, in their temple, would sprinkle believing worshipers with blood as a reminder of their being spiritually washed clean.

The New Testament talks about being sprinkled clean with the blood of Jesus.

In case you are wondering, that's where our forebearers in the Christian faith got the practice of taking the water of baptism and sprinkling them on the believer. Which is what we did here today.

Sprinkled with baptism's waters.
 Sprinkled clean in Jesus.

Baptism - Sacred vows have been made.
 God has vowed His presence and care.
 Parents have vowed their lives of faith.
 A community has vowed its support.

Now we have the challenge and the privilege of living that out.
 Challenge - because there will be times we'll feel like throwing it all away.
 Times when we'll lose our focus.
 Times when we'll get so busy that we'll be distracted, sidetracked.

Privilege -

- because there is nothing better than knowing that what lays ahead is a grand, beautiful eternity of living forever in the presence and home of God.
- because there is nothing more comforting than knowing that we will walk every single step of our journey through life under the care of God.
- because what more meaningful, purpose-ful way to live could there possibly be than having a life that is God directed and ordered?

Baptism – for those of you that have received it; see the water and hear, again, God's personal call to you.

For those of you that have never been baptised, let me challenge you to consider whether now is the time to receive it. Call me and I'd be delighted to help arrange that.

For those of you that have been baptized and find yourself saying, "*You know, I don't think I could stand with a clear conscience before Jesus and honestly say that I've lived in a way that makes my baptism proud*" take a few moments between you and Christ to turn things around this morning.

And for those of you who have been baptized as children, but never followed through with a public commitment to everything it stands for – you've never made a public confession of faith -- I'd like to challenge you to leave apathy behind, stand tall and proud as a Christian. Be open about it. Make that confession. Give me a call this week and we'll work towards that together.

Friends - the water of baptism dries up.
But God's claim on our lives never dries up.

The memories of this day will fade.
But God's love for us will never fade.

In a little while we will get up and leave this place.
But God's real, concrete Presence in our lives will never leave.

So live like it!
And make sure that
 by our words
 and by our example
We help Kallie and Brennon to live like it, too.