

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

Jeremiah 23:16-29

Hebrews 11:17-40; 12:1-3

Luke 12:49-56

Baptism is about death and resurrection – nothing less (Romans 6:1-11). There is joy in this holy house. There is joy in this place because the wonder of Christ's eternal triumph comes cascading upon three young lasses, three of Jesus' little lambs. The Triune God of heaven and earth is not a distant deity who looks upon us with aloof compassion from afar. The King of the universe who called forth light out of darkness, who brought forth all that is using nothing but the power of His Word, this Almighty God draws near to Alexandra, Heidi, and Zosia and tenderly washes them in Jesus' righteousness, tenderly takes up residence in their hearts, tenderly grafts them into the Lord's death and resurrection. It is sweet in our eyes. It is a portrait of wholesome truth, a visual feast of love and promise and our hearts swell with the beauty of it.

Baptism has a context. The sacrament that we have witnessed, the new birth which comes from the womb of the church – it has a context. The more we see of the context, the more beautiful baptism becomes in our eyes. The late 19th century produced a new form of art known as Impressionism. Renoir, Monet, Degas – these artists captured their audiences with their new technique. Impressionist paintings cannot be viewed up close. Well, that's not exactly true. One can look at these paintings up close, but one misses the beauty embedded in the painting. From the proper distance, the colors merge and the subject emerges so that the viewer can grasp what the artist intended. This morning, we look appreciatively at Baptism's context.

Jesus is dismayed. Perhaps you seldom think of our Lord being distressed, but the words recorded in Luke's Gospel make it obvious. "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:49-50). Jesus sees His looming death. He is speaking of His suffering, His cross. The fire of God's wrath against sin will be poured out on Him, and Him alone. The eternal Son of God was made man for the express purpose of being lifted up on that cross. He knows it. He sees it. It distresses Him. The Lord Christ wishes that the hour of His sacrifice were now – the anticipation of it blankets His Spirit. "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled." Fire destroys. Fire also purifies. Remember that.

Jesus also describes His death as a baptism. He was baptized in the Jordan River as He began His ministry. What does that tell you? It tells you that the Son of God is in solidarity with us. What else does it tell you? He was baptized as the Christ. As the Christ, Jesus begins to shoulder the sin of all humanity. Literally, His baptism in water prepared Him for His baptism in His own blood on Good Friday – the two events are linked, inseparable. Jesus is God. Jesus is man. Only God can bear the full weight of humanity's sin. As man, He will suffer for sin. All of it will be put on Him. And the Father will punish sin. Not you or me; the Son, whom the Father loves, will bear it. The Son of God will endure the just punishment for sin. Jesus is distressed as He sees it coming.

And His mind turns to us. The Lord Christ and His life is a line of demarcation. Light and darkness; faith and unbelief; some recognize Jesus as the Savior of the world and cling to Him

with otherworldly force. Some live as enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18). It is a division that none of you can reconcile. It's ironic. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. At His birth, the angels streamed from heaven and proclaimed the wonder of God's presence in our human flesh and what it meant: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14). When the crucified King rose from the dead He appeared to His disciples, showing them the wounds in His hands and side. As He did this, Jesus announced the consequence of those wounds, the consequence of His death and resurrection: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). *Peace* between you and God. *Peace* unleashed in His sacrifice. Peace; an objective reality in His flesh. Wonderful peace! Here, Jesus speaks a different word.

"Do you think that I have come to give peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division" (Luke 12:51). And then it's a laundry list of relationships. If there is any gray in your hair, if there *would be* any gray in your hair if not for "L'Oreal" or "Just for Men" then you are familiar with division. It isn't super pleasant. It's sad. Division can be austere. In some parts of the world, Christians continue to be martyred because of their faith. Division; sometimes this estrangement makes its way into families. Again, it's sad. Christians aren't to join together what God has separated. We don't join truth with lies. We don't unite Christ with Belial (2 Corinthians 6:14). There is no fellowship between light and darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14). Christians aren't to exacerbate this division by being hostile, by being judgmental, by being self-righteous, or caustic or hypocritical or petty or vindictive or sneering or curt – that is not our way. But we *will* defend the Truth. We *will* speak the truth in love. We *will* confess the faith, make plain where our allegiance lies, and we will not compromise our belief for the sake of getting along with the unbelieving world. That brings conflict. It's sad. I can't undo it. I mustn't try. You as well.

Here's where you are called upon to view salvation history from a vantage point that allows you take in today's baptism, this Divine Service and your life. This is a spiritual world. God created humanity to be a spiritual creature, to be in communion with Him. There is more to our constitution than can be empirically discerned. Sin is not a theological abstraction. Sin is real – mine and yours. God loves you; loves you with a Fatherly love which is deep, and wide, and pervasive and active. That love manifested itself in a very particular way (John 3:16). The Son of God ventured into our domain to lay claim to us by death and resurrection. That is the truth. That is the crowning reality of life on earth. And He accomplished it. All hell broke loose on Him. The enemy salivated at claiming the prize of a dead Messiah. The earth shook, the sun refused to shine, and the Son of God was dead. In the tomb, He rested. From the tomb, He rose. You are justified before God by His work. Christ's side was pierced in death and blood and water flowed from the temple of His body and now Alexandra, Heidi, and Zosia are washed in His righteousness (John 19:34; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 7:13-14). Do you have eyes to see it?

Martin Luther, in one of his great hymns, wrote this priceless stanza:
All that the mortal eye beholds ~ Is water as we pour it.
Before the eye of faith unfolds ~ The pow'r of Jesus' merit.
For here it sees the crimson flood ~ To all our ills bring healing;
The wonders of His precious blood ~ The love of God revealing,
Assuring His own pardon.

These priceless girls are children of the Light (1 Thessalonians 5:5). They possess great beauty in their soul – the beauty of a transcendent King, Christ the King. Do you see the context of what lies behind this sacrament? John the Baptist said this: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11). The fire which Jesus came to bring, the fire of God’s wrath which He suffered, He now pours out on these, His daughters. That fire purifies. That fire is the Holy Spirit, redemption, and eternal life. Christ won our salvation two thousand years ago, but He delivers it to temporal creatures who need to receive it personally. That is His holy work among us in the here and now. Do you have the eyes to see it? These young lasses are going to grow strong. I had the privilege of confirming their mothers twenty-one years ago. Now their daughters are brought to the Lord, He takes them in His arms, and blesses them (Mark 10:13-16). Layer upon layer of beauty! Beauty never-ending! We are witnesses! To God alone be the glory.