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Easter 7B
Peace, Seattle
May 20, 2012
Baptism Sunday
John 17:9-16

WADE IN THE WATER

It all starts here, as we wade in these waters:

- Christ's claiming of us, and our journey with him;
- God weaving us—our individual stories—into the grand story of his amazing grace, and fitting the pieces of our lives together in this grand puzzle—this grand experiment called Christian community.

The story of our redemption, the saga of rebirth, the tale of the world's future?
It all begins right here in these waters where God washes, forgives and frees us to be the persons he's created us to be.

Sing it with me…

Wade in the water, wade in the water children,
Wade in the water, God's going to trouble the water.

Kelly Fryer, author of the little book, *RECLAIMING THE "L" WORD*[1] ("L" stands for Lutheran) tells the story of how, one gorgeous spring day at seminary, she found herself stuck in a lecture hall when all she *really* wanted to do was go outside and play.

She writes,

> The professor "must have known that we weren't listening because he suddenly slapped his notebook shut and stopped talking. He wasn't going to waste one more breath on us.
> But before he left the room, he picked up a piece of chalk and went to the board. He drew a gigantic ARROW, pointing straight down, stood back, and said: **'If you understand that, you understand everything you need to know about what it means to be a Christian…who also happens to be a Lutheran.'** And then he left the room.
>
> We just sat there staring at it, this enormous, stark ARROW pointing straight down.
> And then I thought the most logical thing I could think, given everything that had just happened, *'He thinks we're all going to hell.'*
>
> The next time we gathered for class, he began by drawing the same arrow on the board. This time…he had our full attention. **'Here's what it means' he said. 'God always comes down. God *always* comes down.** There is never anything that we can ever do to turn that arrow around and make our way UP to God. God came down in Jesus. And God still comes down, in the bread and in the wine, in the water and in the fellowship of believers. God ALWAYS comes down.'"[2]

Now, sisters and brothers, here's the next startling truth:

When you wade in these waters, your funeral has already taken place.

Let me say it again: *Wade in these waters, and your funeral has already taken place.*

TRUST ME! Says God, **I'LL HANDLE RESURRECTION PART**—BUT NOW TELL ME:

What is it you're going to do with this one, wild, and precious life I've given you?

This, you see, is the real question.

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[1] *Reclaiming the "L" Word: Renewing the Church from its Lutheran Core.* Augsburg Fortress © 2003.
[2] Ibid, pp 29, 30.

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The question of salvation? Over. Done. God took care of it in Jesus.

Now, how are you going to take the grace and love I've given you and, combining it with the one-of-a-kind person you are, put it to work in the world?
How are you going to live it? Enflesh it? Make it real for others around you?

When we stay close to these waters, when we wade in these waters, we will discover our purpose in life, we discover our passion, we discover our vocation.

And here's the reality: the world doesn't want us to go there.
It doesn't want us to go there because the world has other plans for us. It wants to be in charge of defining us; it wants to tell us how much we're worth; it wants to keep us on the merry-go-round of looking for love and belonging in all the wrong places.

God loves the world, the world wants nothing to do with God. And it is willing to do whatever it takes to pull us away from God; to tell us it's all a lie, this God-stuff. And it will throw all kinds of voices our way, voices that will try to tell us who we are.

But we who have entered these waters have one voice and one voice only to follow.
Listen! Can you hear it? YOU, CHILD, ARE MY BELOVED DAUGHTER! MY BELOVED SON! That's God talking! And don't let any one, any way, any time, tell you any different.

But be prepared for resistance. Because wading in baptismal waters means wading into troubled waters.

This weekend Bob Evetts and Kathleen Keyes and I were at the synod assembly in Everett, with 300 other members of the 109 congregations of our Northwest Washington Synod. And we heard from Bishop Ditrikh Brauer of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of European Russia, a companion synod to our own.

Bishop Brauer gave us a history lesson, reminding us of the deep tradition of Lutheranism in Russia that can be traced back to the first German Lutheran pastor who came to Moscow in 1565.

But, he said, after building strength over the next three centuries, the welcome mat that the Lutheran Church received came to a sudden halt with the Russian revolution of 1917, and within 20 years the public work of the Lutheran Church was abruptly ended.

The welcomed church became the persecuted church.
- 2 million German Russians were deported to the far-flung outposts of the growing Soviet empire,
- 300,000 were shot or placed into forced labor camps.
- Only 4 out of 204 Lutheran pastors survived these purges.
- Church buildings were confiscated, destroyed, or converted by the government for other uses.
- Bibles, hymnbooks, libraries, and sacred vessels were confiscated and destroyed.

The church was forced to go underground, meeting in people's homes, in caves, in secret places. Relying on their memories of the stories of scripture and the core traditions that had been passed on to them to guide them, these surviving faithful—many of whom were women—leaned on the Holy Spirit for the hope, strength, and will to survive.

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I once heard Dr. Paul Wee of the Lutheran World Federation's office for Human Rights share about his friendship with East German Bishop Janus Matulas during this same dark era.

Matulas was a big man who'd once been a champion weight lifter, but toward the end of his life, he took ill and gradually this big hulking man was reduced to a bag of skin and bones. Pastor Wee receiving word that the Bishop was failing, rushed with a co-worker to the bedside of his friend.

When they arrived at the door of the Bishop's small bedroom, he motioned them closer. It was clear to them from his condition that he wouldn't live long.

ALL MY LIFE, he told them, I'VE SOUGHT TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO CHRIST.
BUT FAITHFULNESS SOMETIMES PROVOKES.
FIRST THEY TOOK OUR CATHEDRALS AND CHURCHES.
THEY TOOK FROM US OUR BIBLES AND HYMNBOOKS, OUR THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES AND BURNED THEM.
THEN THEY ROUNDED UP MANY OF MY FELLOW PASTORS AND TEACHERS, AND SENT THEM TO THE GULAG.
THEN THEY CONFISCATED MY FARM.
FINALLY, THEY TOOK MY WIFE.

ANYTHING THAT WAS VALUABLE TO ME WAS GONE. THEY TOOK EVERYTHING.
BUT THEY COULD NOT TAKE JESUS FROM ME.

IT WAS THEN, Bishop Matulas said, THAT I REALIZED THAT I WAS TOTALLY FREE.
THAT THERE WAS NOTHING MORE THEY COULD DO TO ME.

WHATEVER CAME MY WAY AFTER THAT POINT, I WAS FREE TO SHARE WITH WHOEVER MIGHT BE IN NEED. BECAUSE I STILL HAD THE ONE THING I NEEDED TO KEEP HOPE ALIVE: I HAD JESUS.

In the 1980's, after 40 years of total isolation, some pastors from the West were finally allowed to visit Russian again. Over the next 10 years liberty grew until in 1991, the Lutheran Church in Russia was allowed to begin public ministry once again. Pastor Ditrikh Brauer, who stood before the assembly yesterday in Everett, was a sign and symbol of the resurgent hope in the gospel.

In Baptism, there's going to be troubled water.

Truth be told, this baptized life in which all God's people around the world share, and in which you, Kale, enter this day, is full of surprises, dangers, and unfinished endings.

And so while we see the large, colorful letters of your name on our baptismal banner today, we ought (I am convinced) have another banner—equally large and clearly lettered—that hangs above this font and every font in every Christian church that says:
DANGER! TROUBLED WATERS AHEAD. ENTER AT YOUR OWN PERIL!

Wade in the water…God's going to trouble the water.

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"I have given them your word," Jesus prays, "and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one…As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

God so loved the world that he came into it, fully, without reservation, entering into every aspect of what it means to be human. God so loved the world that he gave…and God keeps on giving.

For you see, God has not given up on the world.
If Christ's life and ministry, his death and resurrection means anything it mean that!

God has not abandoned the world, far from it. In Jesus God continues, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, to be present in the world—how?—through you…through me…through us.

For it is <u>in</u> these "troubled waters" where Jesus Christ meets us with true healing and hope.
As early church father Tertullian said:

> *"We little fishes, following the example of our IXTHUS, our "BIG FISH" Jesus Christ, are born in water; nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water."*

When we wade in those waters the Spirit of God makes a claim on us, leaves a mark on us that can't be removed, erased, or eradicated; not even death itself can change God's claim or separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Today in the prayer of Jesus, and in the waters of baptism, we come face to face with the God of compassionate and unconditional love.

A God who risked everything for us and who calls us once more to wade in the water.

Kale, wherever you go in your life, whatever shape your life takes, whatever career choices you make, whatever congregations you may call home, whatever relationships become important to you, you will carry that identity with you: **I am a baptized child of God. And we, the body of Christ, your sisters and brothers, with be there with you.**

(Sing) *Wade in the water, wade in the water children,*
Wade in the water, God's going to trouble the water.