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Epiphany 1A – Baptism of Jesus
January 12, 2019
Matthew 3:13-17

WALKING WET

Dearly Beloved, grace, mercy, and peace from God our Creator, from Jesus our Brother, and from the Holy Spirit who has called us into community this day. Amen.

Austin and Kimberly! The day is finally here! The day you've been so eagerly awaiting—the day of your baptism.

In a few minutes you're going to be wading in the water, my young friends, and we couldn't be more exciting to be right there with you.

Now you won't LITERALLY be wading in the water; our new FONT basin, while much BIGGER than the one it replaced, is NOT SO BIG that you can WADE in it like you can wade in the waters of a river or lake or Puget Sound.

So you won't be LITERALLY wading in the water, like Jesus did when he was baptized by John in the Jordan River, but that doesn't mean your baptism today is any less real.

Because GOD PROMISES, through the Holy Spirit, are embedded IN & WITH, UNDER & THROUGH this water, and THAT'S what counts.

Whether the amount we use is three drops, a couple of pitchers full, or a whole ocean full, when GOD says, I'M GOING TO BE THERE—IN THAT WATER, we can be confident that it's true.

And so we'll soon be singing the refrain from that great spiritual:

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

When Jesus met John at the Jordan, it was time for him to go wading in the water. Did he know what kind of trouble awaited him when he knelt down in that river? YOU BET HE DID.

He knew that proclaiming God's reign would lead some to embrace him and others to oppose him.
He knew that leading a people through troubled times meant wading into troubled waters.
He knew that kneeling in the cool, muddy waters of the Jordan marked the beginning of a new time in his life journey—the beginning of his public ministry.

But he also knew he would not be alone—for when he came up from that water, he saw the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him, and he heard the Voice call him BELOVED.

Your baptism today is the beginning of a lifelong journey for you—a journey in which you will walk wet; a journey in which you'll be reminded again and again that you are God's beloveds. child. This is what the baptismal life is all about.

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When my first son was born, the nurse lifted him from his mother's womb and placed him in warm tub of water, where I got to hold him for the very first time.

His mother and I wanted to make his transition from the warm, watery world of the womb to this loud, bright, out-of-the-womb-world to be as easy as possible.

Sometimes the baptismal life is like that bath: warm.... calming.... welcoming.... It feels like home.

This image of baptism reminds us that the same God who knit us together in our mother's womb promises in baptism to always be within reach; to never leave us orphaned.

Have you ever seen a young child encounter the OCEAN for the very first time?
Watching them take in that huge expanse of sand and the relentless waves;
their eyes searching the unbroken horizon, their legs feeling the impulse to run to the surf.

There are no words in a toddler's vocabulary (or a grown-up's, for that matter) that can capture the power and sound and fury and immensity of the ocean surf being experienced for the first time.

And when they reach the water, they immediately discover two things: (A) that the water is COLD! And (B) that it is ALIVE!—it doesn't stay still, it never stopped moving—it comes after them again and again..

The waters of baptism can be like that, too...

- **BRACING...stretched out before us like that endless ocean surf.**
- **And the scale of it all, the sheer immensity of God, and God's love and for little old me is too overwhelming to get our heads around.**
- **And we discover that God's promises aren't still or passive—they're alive.**

And that just like those relentless waves, God comes after us again and again and again with a desire to know us and to be known with a love that will not let us go.

During my college days I did quite a bit of climbing.
One fall, six of us headed out for the summit of Glacier Peak, up in the North Cascades.
We set up basecamp at 6,000 feet the first night, and made the summit early the next afternoon.

But high winds had slowed us down, and by the time we reached base camp again the weather was getting dicey and we had to decide whether we'd hike out that night, or hunker down at base camp. Three of us chose to hike on down, while the others stayed on the mountain.

In the growing dark we stumbled down the climbing trail on sore feet, down through the trees, catching our boots on roots, nearly falling countless times until, finally, we reached the main trail on the valley floor and had to feel our way along the trail.

Our goal was the HOT SPRINGS we'd passed on our way in the day before.
We were hungry, dog tired, soaked through with sweat, and a steady drizzle was falling.
Knowing we'd soon be soaking our weary bones in those waters was the one thing that kept us going.

And after what seemed like an eternity, we finally came around the bend and there were the Hot Springs, just as we'd imagined them...

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There was only one problem...a man and woman were already in the pool, enjoying some wine and cheese by candlelight!

Shocked and disappointed we stood there like a pack of ravenous wolves staring at our dinner.

Well, the couple, to their credit, got the message...and by the time we returned from setting up tents, the hot springs were ours; and we quickly pulled off our boots, peeled off our clothes and lowered ourselves into the steaming waters.

Sometimes the waters of baptism will be like those pools:

- a sanctuary of solace from the hostility of the world;
- a refuge where fears and anxieties are soothed and we find some relief from the aches, blisters, and bruises that life has brought our way.

When we're touched by the waters of baptism our lives are placed within the pattern of God's abiding promises, and God's pledge to never leave us or forsake us.

My young brother, my young sister, your journey in faith has just begun.

And God is choosing us today—parents, sponsors, and community—to guide you and lead you in the way of Jesus; reminding you when the disappointments and trials come, that you are a beloved child of God, with whom God is well-pleased; calling you, again and again, to return to these waters like salmon to their natal stream.

Whatever shape our lives take, whatever direction we go, our lives are forever caught up in the memory and mercy of God.

Now the world would like us to forget that. The devil with all his empty promises, does everything in his power to convince us that the promises God makes to us are a mirage.

He tried doing it to Jesus, and he tries to do it to us too.

But try as he might, Satan cannot win the day. He has been defeated forever by the one who gave himself up on the cross and was raised on the third day, defeating forever any power or circumstance that would separate us from God.

Dearly beloved, once we wade into the waters with Jesus; once we enter that stream, that rhythm of going down, of being buried, of coming up, being raised, we belong to him.

And Christ says...

Are you confused? Look to me for direction.
Are you lost? Train your eyes on me.
Feeling critical about yourself? Remember that I love you always...
We've been buried together, you and I, and we'll be raised together, too. You can count on it.

None of us knows how long we'll be here on this earth. But the mark of Christ's cross upon us is a mark that never fades away, and his bond with us is so deep not even death can sever it.

Thanks be to God for these gifts, for this legacy, that waits for us as we wade in the waters.
AMEN.