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Proper 16C
August 25, 2019
Luke 13:10-17

# NEW FONT—NEW LIFE

**We're initiating our new BAPTISMAL FONT today! Can you tell I'm excited?**

The ARTISTS we worked with to create this FONT and STAND did a marvelous job of executing our vision for what it might be.

- A THREE-LEGGED FOUNDATION, grounded in the Holy Trinity;
- A LARGE BASIN of TRANSLUCENT GLASS with an embedded IRIDESCENT LAYER reflecting the RAINBOW of God's never ending promise;
- SLENDER ARMS THAT RISE UP to HOLD THE BASIN ALOFT;
- And a CIRCULAR PLATFORM BENEATH that DANCES WITH LIGHT whenever WATER is poured.

**Holy Baptism is the beginning of our lifelong journey as followers of Jesus, and we like to make a big deal of baptism here at Peace!**

SYMBOLS MATTER, and the rich and varied symbols of BAPTISM—woven throughout the story of God's people and throughout our liturgy—have implications for everything we do.

**When THE WORLD tries to tell us who we are and what ought to matter for us,**
**WE POINT TO THE FONT as the place where our CORE IDENTITY is formed.**

We commissioned this new font and stand to help us enlarge the symbol of baptism within our practice with the express hope that it will serve the people of Peace for generations to come.

One of the things I've most enjoyed when traveling abroad is discovering the great variety of fonts in use, both ancient and modern, and the symbols they employ.

- In Iona's Abbey we saw an 8-sided font—celebrating the 8th Day of creation—quarried from the island's ancient green marble.
- In Assisi we saw the worn and patched font of San Rufino, where baby Francis was baptized—noticing it was only steps away from stone lions that held hapless victims in their grip—a graphic reminder of the cost discipleship.
- The font at San Sulpice in Paris features an enormous bronze shell with lifelike images of octopus, coral, and seaweed carved in the rock below it.

**But the most curious font came to light when we visited St. Lawrence Church outside of Durham, England, where our host Penny Martin shared the font's unique history.**

As it turns out, after centuries of use the simple, Norman-era font, was sold to a local farmer who took to using it to water his cattle! Nearly a century later the font was rediscovered and reclaimed.

If you look closely at it today, you can see how one side of the stone rim is lower than the other—having been worn down by the frequent motion of cows stretching their necks to reach the water!

**Would that we'd all be as eager to quench our thirst at the Source of baptismal water as those bovine beauties!** [1]

[1] You can find a picture of the font on my sabbatical blog: http://sabbatical.peacelutheranseattle.org/2014/04/28/from-church-to-field-and-back-again-by-erik/

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**But whatever the shape a font may take; whatever materials it's fashioned from; whatever its history—its purpose remains is constant: To hold the promise-infused water for holy baptism.**

**"Water by itself is plain water,"** says Luther in the Small Catechism, **"but with the word of God it becomes a grace-filled fountain of life; a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit."**

- **It's in this grace-filled water that we are born anew, our lives secure.**
- **It's in this water that the charge to love God and neighbor begins.**
- **It's in this water that God's call to care for the Earth is made clear.**
- **And it's from this water that we emerge to stand tall and claim our inheritance.**

**But friends, you and I both know: the world doesn't want it that way.**

**The world has a different script it wants us to live by: to tell us that who we are is not enough; that we are "less than" we should be. To convince us we're all alone.**

The ultimate end of the world's agenda is to train us to become instruments of conflict rather than peace; to sow hatred rather than love, doubt rather than faith, despair rather than hope.

And with pressure like that coming at us, we can become bowed down to the point where it's hard for us to stand at all—much less stand straight.

So we open up the gospel today, and lo and behold, here's Jesus once again showing us the way forward.

**When I hear Luke tell this story of the bent over woman, my mind goes to a couple places.**
The first place it goes is to a former parishioner of mine named Marion.

- Marion had so many surgeries in her life it was hard to keep track.
- By the time I met her she was 70, and walking around nearly bent in half because of her degenerating spine.
- But in spite of her chronic back problems, Marian managed to contribute significantly to the life of that parish over the years. And her deepest joy was singing in the church choir.

An abiding memory I have of Marion is seeing her, bent over, choir robe on, walking up the hall from the choir room on Sunday morning, lifting her head to catch my eye and flash a smile,
GOOD MORNING PASTOR!

**Marian taught me that it's possible to share in the joy of community, even when pain and discomfort are constant companions.** So when I hear this story about a bent over woman coming to church on Sabbath, I think of Marion.

**But as we listen again to this gospel story, there's something in verse 11—a detail in Luke's language—that's worth noticing. He says:**

> JUST THEN THERE APPEARED A WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT THAT HAD CRIPPLED HER FOR 18 YEARS.

**NOT: "a woman who was crippled for 18 years."**
**BUT: "a woman with a spirit that had crippled her or 18 years." Do you hear the difference?**

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Luke's saying there's more to this story than a physical handicap. There's some other dimension of her life experience that's contributed to her condition; that's holding her captive.

**Luke doesn't say how old the woman is, and at first I imagine a woman about Marian's age.**

But when that phrase "a spirit had crippled her" sinks in, I wonder if she wasn't much younger than 70 when she walked into that synagogue; maybe 40, or 30 when Jesus called her to his side.

The ME-TOO movement has brought to light myriad stories from women who, in any number of ways, were taken advantage of by powerful men. Lately, we've been hearing about one man in particular who aided by a circle of enablers had a particular penchant for crippling the spirits of young women.

Now, after years, those women are speaking out, their voices are being heard and—in some cases for the first time—believed. What kind of courage does it take to stand in the light of day, tell your story, and call out the person who derailed your life? Immense courage. And they are doing it.

OUGHT NOT THIS WOMAN, WHOM SATAN BOUND FOR 18 LONG YEARS, BE SET FREE?

Sisters and brothers, wading in these waters means wading in solidarity with all those who've been forced to live bent-over lives; who've been prevented from claiming their dignity as people who bear image of God.

When we're touched by these waters, you see, we notice them, because JESUS notices them.

And then something incredible happens. Calling us together—he lays his hands upon us all; and little by little no one's staring at their feet anymore. Little by little no one's wondering at their worth. He's lifted our eyes to show us the faces of the beloved community—and WE ARE FREE!

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**Two beautiful boys enter the waters of this font today…Soren Michael and Logan William.**

The world may have plans for them. But Christ has plans too—plans and purposes that run deeper and last longer than anything the world can throw their way.

**And you, dear parents and sponsors, and you, beloved community, are integral to Christ's plan: To teach these boys what loving looks like, what serving and being served feels like, and who is worthy of trust.**

When, by the grace of God, we do that—then their futures, whatever the specifics—will be bright.

Amen.