

Third Sunday of Easter  
Vicar Cheryl A. Korte

Sunday, April 26, 2009  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Acts 3:12–19; Psalm 4  
1 John 3:1–7; Luke 24:36b–48

Imagine yourself standing beneath one of the most extraordinary sights in creation--a waterfall. A waterfall is beautiful *and* powerful; dynamic yet deadly; vast yet nothing but a pool of tiny drops of water flowing together at a tremendous force.

Feel the pulsation in your heart as the thunderous flow of H<sub>2</sub>O surges far below. Sense a layer of dew upon your face. Embrace the faint rainbow as it glistens through rays of sunshine and drops of rainwater. Perhaps you have witnessed such dramatic downfall of water as it sprays indiscriminately over its spectators.

Perhaps it was the Niagara, Victoria, or Yosemite – or one of the 3 tallest waterfalls towering over 3,000 feet in Venezuela, Africa, or Peru? Or perhaps you travelled on the Congo River and saw the two largest waterfalls in the world. Yes waterfalls are indeed God’s creation.

In my opinion, some of the best movie scenes have been shot in waterfalls. In a depiction of the French and Indian Revolution, a scene from “The Last of the Mohicans,” remains in my memory. As the enemy corners characters, Daniel Day Lewis and Madeline Stowe, in a cave beneath a waterfall, Lewis above the roar of the falls shouts, “Stay Alive, I will find you.” Plunging into the cascade hundreds of feet below Lewis escapes through rushing waters struggling to keep alive their dreams and the lives of those he loves. The waterfall becomes his safety net, midst the danger and seemingly final moments of his life. He takes that which could end his life and makes it his redeemer.

Waterfalls have a way of engulfing the drama. Another infamous jump plays out in the movie, “The Fugitive.” Harrison Ford fights to clear his name and his medical reputation. Running from the law after being falsely accused of his wife’s murder, Ford is also cornered at the edge beneath a waterfall, this time by the FBI agent played by Tommy Lee Jones. Ford turns and drops into the waterfall to the depths of the cold uncontrollable waters below.

And if you can handle one more image, allow me to introduce you to the movie, “Last of the Dogmen.” Tom Beranger and Barbara Hershey track an Indian tribe originally thought to have been annihilated. An entire existence wiped from the earth. Yet living remotely in a large forested area of the Rockies, beyond a waterfall lives this exclusive remnant of people. Their hidden home a paradise. The only thing that separates them from the rest of the world is a cave dwelling beneath a perpetual waterfall. That is until a stray Indian feather shaft leads Beranger and Hershey to this green lush paradise...an entirely new dimension. Living peacefully and intentionally the Dogmen seek only to live in harmony hurting no one and no thing.

Though fictional drama, the demons against which these characters in all three scenarios struggle epitomizes the moral fiber of the world in which we live. These are the dark forces which hinder our rights as human beings, or deprive us of peace and harmony. Even the smallest of contamination can ruin our attempt to live righteously. We can surely find hundreds of examples where Satan dwells. On the other hand, I dare not stand here and tell you what I think is wrong with the world. I suppose I

could point out the demons and darkest corners in which they hide, but I must be careful. What is it they say? “When you point one finger away from you there are four pointing back at you?”

Though easy to single out the faults of others, we don’t have to look very far to see sin in our own lives. The Christian church is often accused of being bigoted, conceited, or critical. We don’t mean to be. We sometimes instruct one another to recognize sin and do that which is right while overlooking our own integrity. It may even go against our natural grain to accept, into the fold, those who have wronged society. Those who have hurt us or harmed those we love.

We may not consider ourselves judgmental, but there is consensus of the unchurched that we are. God encourages us to release that which holds us captive.

Robert Capon reminds us, “The church is not in the morality business...the church is in the forgiving business.” (crossmarks.com). We are reminded as such in our gospel today, where Luke declares <sup>47</sup> that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations.”

As representatives of Christ we open our arms wide so that everyone can come to know Christ through repentance and forgiveness. That is our business.

While gently pointing out the errors of one’s life, as we ourselves strive to stay on the path of righteousness, and through scripture readings, we steer ourselves and that person toward God. And unless we can in the same breath, tell others we are incapable of doing only good, and unless we confess that we all “sin and fall short of the glory of God” we need not bother to point out the wayward lives of others.

Our first lesson in Acts today reads,<sup>19</sup> Repent, therefore and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,” while another version reads...“Repent then and turn to God, so that ...times of Refreshing may come from the Lord.” The Hebrew word for repent is *Shuv* which means to turn around or turn back to. We are asked to turn back to God...so that we may be refreshed...stimulated, uplifted, invigorated, energized ...all that which comes from the Lord.

As the waterfalls add energy and stimuli to the scenes in movie scripts, so confessing our sins, and being truly sorry for what we have done, rejuvenates us and inspires us. It gives us hope; a river of hope. The common thread found in the mentioned waterfall scenes are metaphors for Hope.

In the last of Mohicans there is Hope as the Lewis character gives his all for the one he loves. In the Fugitive, Hope holds up one man as he risks his life for the love he lost. The Last of the Dogmen...is the essence of a whole and healthy existence. It is where Hope survives untouched by society. Though scripted for a movie, it is not such a far stretch to see the hope to which we, too, cling. A hope that fills us when we confess all our wrong doings before God knowing we are (in our own liturgical words) captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.

When we acknowledge all our sins, God sets us apart. We are made holy by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Purified through our baptismal waters, we are cleansed of our sins.

It is a gift given to us each day as we live in renewal of God's ever flowing love. Just as the currents and forces of a beautiful pure waterfall drop to a clear body of water, so we too find ourselves in purified living waters.

I know this is not new. As Lutherans and faithful followers of Christ, we confess our sins at the beginning of each worship service. In addition, to public confession and absolution, we cannot help but recall our individual sins. But because we are uncomfortable, acknowledging our sins, we may prefer to sweep our confessions under the rug. Rather than let our confessions flow out of our mouths and into the raging rivers away from us ---never to return---we hold on to our grudges, our jealousies, and our arrogance. Rather than letting the current of God's love take all that is bad away from us and restore to us a crystal clear life, we'd rather harbor our hatred, our prejudices, and our fears. God encourages us to release that which holds us captive.

A small incident happened in our household last week. On the heels of Easter and having had some time off, my husband and I were enjoying a beautiful spring day when we received the news. We had to move. MOVE? Are they crazy? Why make us pack up and move across campus only to move out again in ten months when I graduate? Policy. Well let me tell you we were livid, the emotions ran wilder than any rapids you have seen. We were beside our selves. You see we live in the lower level of a remodeled 1898 brick home with a wrap around porch, very similar to the house we sold in Minnesota. God graciously gave us this home to live in for two years as we fondly remembered all that we had left behind when we came to seminary. Outside the house but fifty feet away sets a Victory Garden. A place my husband found therapeutic moments and satisfying labor.

Now we have to move across campus away from all of this. Boy that's inconvenient we cried. That's not fair. It doesn't make sense we claimed....Well you get the picture.

Later that day I had to make a visit to the doctor for my ear. While sitting in the doctor's office, I noticed a woman who was maybe in her fifties or sixties. She was a rather large woman, long straight whitish blonde hair wearing a colorful sequenced blouse. She walked with her head down not greeting anyone with her eyes. Looking forlorn and dreadfully sad she waited for a ride for probably 40 minutes before she disappeared. My heart broke wondering who she was and where she was going. What was her story I wondered. And why was she at the clinic? I may never know.

What I do know is that when I got home, I told Craig, "Our problems are few." We have so much to be thankful for. Even my doctor visit was minor. Later that evening, Craig told me he had a long talk with God and asked God to forgive him for being self-centered and immature. You know he was right. We acted selfishly – and asking for God's forgiveness felt good.

Think how good it will feel when I confess all my sins and tell God how truly sorry I am as I point out, the best I can, each and every sin I have committed today. Though impossible to name them all, I could probably name quite a few...arrogance, jealousy, domineering, envious; -I have been ill mannered, ill prepared, and ill tempered at times. My point is this. If we are to confess our sins *then* we ought to confess our sins. Every one of them...or as many as we can remember.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer remarked that "Lutherans are somewhat unique among "Protestant" confessions ... because they retained the use of individual confession and forgiveness." ([www.lutheranforum.org/articles/clint-schnekloth/bonhoeffer](http://www.lutheranforum.org/articles/clint-schnekloth/bonhoeffer)). We say it regularly in church as a

community, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Dr Senkbeil, associate professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, says "Notice how the forgiveness of sins is at the heart of the Holy Spirit's work in Christ's Church... forever delivering the precious gift of the forgiveness of sins to blood-bought souls through the efficacious power of God's mighty Word. (Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil <http://www.ctsfw.edu/online/thykingdom/issues/16/3>)

God has already forgiven us. God knows our sins even before we do. The price has already been paid. The nails already embedded. The Psalm we sang today is a melody of God's harmonious love sung through our confession and response to forgiveness. Our hearts are filled with God's love and cleansed as we open up to God. "You set me free when I am hard-pressed; have mercy on me and hear my prayer." So says the Psalmist.

From another perspective, Shirley Gangstad, vice president of the SE MN Synod believes we are conditioned to look at our "brokenness... at what we can not do" rather than to what we can do. "We seem to focus more on what we do not have, rather ... how much we have to work with. By focusing on our brokenness we neither let our light shine nor give glory to the God. Jesus took care of our brokenness and sinfulness so that we can be saints" ([http://www.semnsynod.org/river\\_crossings/2009/05/shirleybof0509.pdf](http://www.semnsynod.org/river_crossings/2009/05/shirleybof0509.pdf)).

As Lutherans, we believe we are both saints and sinners simultaneously: Which is why our "Baptism needs to be constantly reaffirmed" (World Council of Churches, Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry). It is through the healing waters of baptism that we are empowered to live anew each day. Just as the waterfalls are beautiful and powerful, so we in our Christ like actions bring beauty to the world. Just as the waterfalls are dynamic yet deadly so we also portray ourselves depending on our perspective. Just like the waterfalls are vast, and at the same time, individual drops of water flowing together, we too stand before God as one individual while simultaneously and collectively standing as a tremendous force ...one body in Christ.

We are the essence of a rainbow promising a ray of hope each day as we encounter our broken selves and our broken brothers and sisters.

"Repent then and turn to God, so that ...times of Refreshing may come from the Lord." AMEN