

Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29;  
Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The other day I was standing outside the grocery store. The rain was pouring down and next to me stood a little girl about six years old with curly hair and freckles. Next to her were her mom and a few other people. This was the kind of rain that gushes over the tops of rain gutters, as if in such a hurry it cannot wait to hit the earth and has not time to flow down the water spout.

Well there we stood, waiting patiently under the awning. I was mesmerized by the rainfall, lost in the sound and the sight of the heavens washing away the dirt and dust of the world, and with childhood memories of getting completely soaked while running carefree through the puddles and splashing around. I was entranced by the showers when suddenly the little girl spoke up. "Let's run through the rain, Mom!" "Oh honey," she answered, "we'll wait for the rain to let up."

There was silence. About a minute later, she repeated, "Mom, let's run through the rain!" "But we'll get drenched!" the mom exclaimed. "No we won't, Mom. That's not what you said this morning," the young girl said as she tugged at her mom's arm. "This morning? When did I say we could run through the rain and not get wet?" "Don't you remember, Mom, when you were talking to Daddy about his cancer, you said, 'If God can get us through this, He can get us through anything!'"

There was dead silence. The only thing you could hear was the rain. As we stood there quietly, the mom paused and thought for a moment and then said, "Honey you're absolutely right! Let's run through the rain. If God lets us get wet, well maybe we just need washing." And off they ran.

The innocence of a child, and a mom's recognition of such honesty, is the same relationship we have with God. At times we lose that childlike faith – we forget to put all of our trust in our loving God – and that is when doubt creeps in. The protection and the confidence the little girl felt when she heard her parents talking about God's power and strength is the same for us; there is no one or no thing greater than God, or more powerful.

The Psalm we just sang praises such supreme power. "Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength . . . the voice of the Lord is a powerful voice . . . which splits the flames of fire . . . shakes the wilderness . . . sits enthroned above the flood . . . as King forevermore." Our lives don't have to be complicated if we let go of our inhibitions and our fears and trust God. Giving over control can be as easy as dashing through the puddles and letting the rain soak us to the skin.

The relief of shedding our burdens can be as wonderful as the warm sensation after finding refuge from a storm, with the sense of newness and freshness settling inside us as we come in from the cold and dry ourselves off.

We are given this same freshness and newness in our baptism. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ,” so says Paul in Galatians. And in Ephesians, “Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Immersed in society, we find ourselves drenched with demands, pressures, and the many decisions we face each day. We are a fallen humanity, but we need not be afraid or overwhelmed because God wraps us in new life in our baptism. It’s a gift God continues to give, commanding us to “Go . . . make disciples . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” These human elements of water and Holy Scripture are the instruments in which we through baptism become God’s children. We are forgiven. We are led into a new life with Christ. And we are given the promise of everlasting life.

In fact, in some of the most significant moments of the Bible where water appeared to be bringing life to an end, water actually brought new life. For example in Genesis, the Spirit of God hovered “over the waters” when creating order out of chaos. God saved the earth from the waters of the flood bringing new life to humanity, and God brought the Israelites safely through the sea, leading the chosen people into a promised land. Even on the cross, the prevailing presence of God as a soldier pierces Jesus’ side, and out poured the water and blood.

Of course water alone doesn’t make those things happen, it’s God’s word, which is in and with the water. And that is why baptism is so significant, because without God’s word, water is just plain water, and not baptism. But with God’s word, it is a baptism, a grace-filled water of life, a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul said to Titus in the third chapter, “. . . which God poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our savior, [so] that we, justified by the same grace are made heirs accordingly to the hope of eternal life.”

This is what we learned in confirmation, in Luther’s *Small Catechism*. Yes, water is a powerful thing when God is behind it. And through baptism we find the comfort and strength we need if we want to live a Christian life. Baptism is not a one-time deal. It is not temporary. It lasts forever! And so does God’s love. It lasts forever, and is magnified many times over. Think of someone you love. Take that love and multiply it times infinity. That is God’s love. Even when we mess up.

If we can find it in our hearts to forgive someone we love who has messed up or made mistakes on this earth, surely God who is almighty, will go to even greater lengths to forgive us. Isn’t that why John 3:16 is one of the most well-known verses in the world? “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life.” We cannot change or add to what Jesus has already done, but we can live our lives in response to that gift, the gift of baptism.

Hopefully, as confirmands, you have had time to reflect on your own lives this past year as you prepared to affirm your baptism. Today is a very important day. Your confirmation signals your maturity and willingness to take the responsibility of being a baptized believer. As God tugs at your heartstrings, let God's love surround you and show you the way. For "God gives voice to the voiceless, power to the powerless, and worth to the worthless. God speaks to us so that our lives may be a living testimony." Indeed, "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

This is the faith which causes us to dance with joy and awe beneath the raindrops as the heavens wash away the dust and dirt of the world. Sometimes we get to enjoy the sunshine and the rainbows, and other times we have to endure the rains. "If God lets us get wet, well maybe we just need washing."

Amen.