

McCabe United Methodist Church
“Come on in, the Water’s Fine!”
Isaiah 43:1-7 * Luke 3:15-17, 21-22: January 5, 2014
Pastor Rick Fossum

Did you ever see the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* It’s one of my favorites. There’s a part in the movie where Delmar, one of the actors, gets baptized.

The scene goes something like this: Everett (played by George Clooney), Pete and Delmar have just escaped from prison and they’re hiding in the woods. While hiding, they happen to see a strange church-like group that’s headed to a nearby lake to get the group baptized and they’re singing.

Delmar is overwhelmed by this group and their music. Finally, he can’t control himself any longer. He leaves his hiding place and runs into the water after them and gets baptized himself.

As he heads back to his friends, who are still hiding in the woods, he declares, **“neither God nor mans’ got nothing on me now!”** And then he challenges Everett and Pete by saying, **“Come on in, the water’s fine!”** He wants them to get baptized too!

Baptism. A pastor once described baptism like this: **“In baptism, we are spiritually cleaned and renewed. In baptism, we’re adopted into the family of God. In baptism, we’re given a clean slate; a new start in life.”**

I think this is how Delmar must have felt on the day of his baptism. He was spiritually cleansed and renewed, brought into God’s family and given a new life.

In our Scripture reading from Luke, Jesus was baptized. Jesus knew that baptism was something he needed to do and so he finds John, John the Baptist. Luke tells it like this: **“As Jesus was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’.”**

Since that time, Christians everywhere, for the past 2,000 years, have been getting baptized. Some are baptized young and some old, some are dunked in tanks of water and some are sprinkled, but we’re all baptized. It’s God’s way of saying to one and all, **“Come on in, the water’s fine.”**

Something amazing happens to us in baptism. God reaches out to us, grabs us and claims us as God’s own. We become a part of the family of God.

Baptism doesn't make us perfect. Delmar was far from perfect both before and after his baptism, but now God was with him and that was the difference.

A man was trying to sell an old warehouse he owned. The warehouse had been empty for years and needed major repairs. Vandals had damaged the doors, smashed the windows, graffiti was on the walls. The warehouse was in tough shape.

One day, this man was showing his warehouse to a prospective buyer and was explaining how he would fix the doors and broken windows and make the other necessary repairs.

The prospective buyer said, **"Forget about the repairs. If I buy this place, I'm going to tear down this old building. I want to build something new here."**

This is baptism. God exchanges something old for something new, old life for new.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we're told, **"He makes all things new."**

And that includes us.

In Isaiah, God reminds us, **"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."** -Isaiah 43:1-3 (NRSV)

God was with the people of the Old Testament and God continues to be with us today.

I remember a story from the early 1990s, about this one family that lived in Cuba. They had a eight-year old daughter who was a gifted musician. She played the violin. Her name was Lizbet. Like many Cubans at that time, the family dreamed about leaving Cuba and living in the U.S. where they hoped to find freedom and opportunity.

For several months, Jorge, Lizbet's father, had been collecting old inner tubes from a nearby truck garage and patching them. He had plans for the inner tubes. Finally, in August of 1994, the Cuban security forces along the beaches were cut back. It was time for them to escape!

Jorge built a raft out of the old inner tubes. He called his daughter and told her to get ready. Lizbet went to her room and came back with her Bible and violin. **"I'm**

ready,” she announced.

They left their old lives behind and armed with only their faith and each other and a bunch of old inner tubes they set out for America and a new life. They hoped that the new would be better than the old.

In baptism, we also leave the old for the new. We say **YES** to Jesus Christ and we say **NO** to our old selves and to our old ways. The transformation from the old to the new doesn't happen overnight. It takes a lifetime to become the persons God wants us to be, but God promises to help us on the journey.

Today, we're going to have the opportunity to renew our baptismal promises. I think it's always a good idea to renew important promises from time to time like our wedding promises, our church membership promises and our baptismal promises.

In a few minutes, you'll be invited to come forward. I have two bowls of water. The water is a symbol of God's cleansing, renewing and healing power.

By the way, six days after Lizbet and her family left Cuba, they were rescued up by the U.S. Coast Guard. Lizbet didn't speak English, but she wanted to thank her rescuers. She took her violin and began playing a song for them. It was a song she had memorized and rehearsed many times in her room back in Cuba. The song was *The Star Spangled Banner*. For Lizbet, America's national anthem was a symbol of her new life.

For us, baptism and water are symbols of our new life.

I want everyone to understand that we're not re-baptizing anyone. We don't re-baptize people in the United Methodist Church. Today, will be a reaffirmation or a renewal of our baptismal promises to God.

Would you please turn to page 50 of our United Methodist Hymnal. This is a *Service of Reaffirmation*. I invite you to join me in reaffirming our baptismal promises.

[The Baptismal Covenant IV, p. 50-52, UM Hymnal]

I invite you to come forward. If you haven't been baptized and would like to be baptized, I invite you kneel at the altar rail and I will baptize today.

Now, come forward and touch the water, let it run through your fingers and once again say "**Yes**" to Jesus Christ and "**Yes**" to the life that we've been given. "**Come on in, one and all, the water is fine.**"