

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, Newfoundland

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, May 29, 2005

Psalm 46

Genesis 9:8-16

I Peter 3:18-22; Romans 3:22b-31

Matthew 7: 21-29

Sermon: "Child of Covenant, Child of Grace"

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The earth is a terrifying and shaky place to live. In the Scriptures we read today, the Psalm speaks of "mountains" that "shake in the heart of the sea", of "waters that roar and foam", and of the mountains high above the sea that "tremble with its tumult". The words make us think of the Boxing Day tsunami that came ashore in Indonesia, in Sri Lanka, in Thailand, and in islands of the Indian Ocean, a destructive wave that smashed buildings, leveled whole villages, and swept thousands of people, men, women, children, babes in arms-- to their deaths.

The Old Testament lesson comes at the end of the story of the great flood, a story of mighty rains, and rising waters, and land inundated, and cities swept away with all their inhabitants. Here too is a story of destructive, even vindictive waters.

And in the parable that concludes the sermon on the mount, Jesus speaks about rains that fall, floods that rise, and winds that beat and pummel a house, so that a house built on sand collapses in the face of all the power of nature that is arrayed against it.

Last week we saw on television pictures of flood waters raging in parts of Nova Scotia, waters that came from deluging rains, waters lapping up against the decks and porches of people's houses, waters bending and stretching bridges, waters washing away pieces of roads and highways. And usually away from cameras recording their plight, offshore oil rigs, fishing boats, and great ships at sea face the cold roiling waters and sometimes lose in the struggle against them, and the sea claims the lives of rig workers, of sailors and fishermen. People have come to our house, with its view out onto Conception Bay, and they've said, "I wouldn't want to live here, not and look out onto that water. That water has taken some good buddies of mine. No, I wouldn't want to be looking at that bay all the time." A different perspective on the sea, when it has been your workplace, and the place where your life is risked, and might be lost.

Psalm 46 doesn't only speak about destructive power at work in nature; it also speaks of turmoil in the affairs of nations:

"The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter".

There seems to be a link between the destructive power of nature and destructiveness in the

story of humankind. And in a certain way God acts destructively in response to the violence and turmoil among the nations:

“Come, behold the works of the Lord;  
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.”

God’s war is against the weapons. The earth is a shaky and terrifying place to live, a place of flood, wind, wave and earthquake, and we have made it more terrifying with our human violence, with awesome weapons, bombs and land-mines, mortars and missiles, tanks and fighter planes. It is a strange world into which a new-born child should be born.

Yet if we listen to the Scriptures attentively this morning, we hear a message that insistently makes itself heard, above the roiling seas and the rumbling mountains, above the howling winds and torrents of rain beating down, above the noise of war and strife.

Listen! Right in the middle of Psalm 46 it is there:

“There is a river whose streams make glad  
the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.  
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;  
God will help it when the morning dawns.”

There is a river. Not a swollen, angry, death-dealing river, but a river that brings joy and life. There is a river, flowing from the threshold of God’s temple, as we read in the book of the Prophet Ezekiel, a river, in his vision, growing deeper as it gently flows outwards, a river teeming with fish, a river that waters the roots of trees that grow on its banks so that they are in leaf and bear fruit throughout the year. It is a river that will sweeten even the waters of the Dead Sea, so that it, too, will become a living body of water, swarming with fish, and people around its banks harvesting the fish for food. (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

There are “streams in the desert”, as we read in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

“the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground, springs of water.” (Isaiah 35: 6-7) .

And then there is the beautiful passage in Isaiah 55, where we read,

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11)

The life-giving streams of water cause a transformation of the landscape:

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle" (Isaiah 55:13)

And,

"The desert shall rejoice and blossom,  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing." (Isaiah 35:1-2)

There are waters, waters that are the gift of God, waters that bring life, and healing, joy, and peace.

The prophet sees these waters as like the Word of God, which is sent to order, and heal, and bring life to us, so that even though all around us is turmoil, and violence, and destruction, nevertheless God gives us his own Word like a spring of water, a healing stream, a life-giving river, a reality which breaks in upon us unexpected and undeserved, to do a new thing in the midst of the disorder and desolation, to respond to something deep within us, our thirst for life.

"He leads me beside still waters, "

we read in the Shepherd Psalm,

"he restores my soul."

Still waters, life-giving waters, healing waters, waters which make the earth rejoice, waters which make our spirits whole, God-gifted waters, God's transforming and life-giving Word.

As Christians our hearts leap when we read in the Old Testament about these God-gifted waters, for in them we cannot but discern Jesus, the living Word of God, Jesus, the Word made flesh.

Jesus, formed as a human being in the waters of a woman's womb; Jesus, who went down into the waters of the Jordan and there experienced his Father saying to him, "You are my Son, my beloved one; I am well-pleased with you." Jesus, thirsty beside a well in Samaria, sharing our human thirst, asking a woman of Samaria for a drink of water from the well, and promising to give her in turn such waters that if she drank from them, she would never thirst again (John 4:7-14). Jesus, standing up in the Temple of Ezekiel's vision, and declaring,

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the

scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38).

Jesus, coming beside his friends mourning for the death of Lazarus, and shedding his own tears that their mourning might be turned into joy (John 11:35). Jesus, on the cross, a sword thrust into his side, and from that side, a disciple sees blood and water flowing out (John 19:34, cf. I John 5:6-8), flowing out like that healing stream from the dwelling place of God, flowing out to bring forgiveness, and healing, peace and life to a world siezed in the grip of hatred, and disease, war and death.

Jesus, Himself, giving Himself, giving His all, for us. That is the life-giving stream. That is the healing stream. That is the stream that makes the desert bloom. These are the waters, that if we drink of them, we will never thirst again. This is the spring that begins to flow in our hearts and overflow into the lives of others, that they too may know forgiveness, and healing, and the life that is eternal.

And this is the water of our baptism, the water that Lori Kim and Andrew have brought their precious child, Benjamin Pieter to receive this morning. Jesus offers to us and to our children the gift and the grace of his very own life in the sign of water, the sign of baptism. Jesus offers his own life that we might come alive to God, that we might be like flowers springing up in the desert to make the land rejoice before God, that we might become people who affect those around us like a cascade of warm water flowing over a smooth rock and showering down over the shoulders of people who come to sit under it in the pool beneath, because the waters are lively, because they are spirited, because they restore our soul.

Lori Kim and Andrew, you have presented your son in faith to receive the waters of baptism, and you have believed for him that the Lord, the Giver of life, is able to cause to spring forth in his life that spring of Christ's life, that spring that wells up with blessing for him, and overflows, that through him, that life of Christ might flow into the lives of others.

Dear friends, today we all have the opportunity to recall our own baptism, and by faith to reclaim its promise in our own lives. Like Benjamin Pieter, each of us is called to be a Child of God's gracious covenant, and a Child of God's astonishing grace. Today we have the opportunity to turn our faces upwards and open our hands in delight and in joy, and let the showers of God's love and grace wash over us afresh, that we might be renewed in Christ, be more deeply aware than ever of his grace and his love, that we might more and more be to others around us like overflowing springs of graciousness, and healing, and peace, until the stream that comes from our hearts joins the streams that flow from the lives of those around us, and the streams that flow from everyone who has opened themselves to that gentle cascade from above, until every storm has been stilled, and every hatred dissolved, and every violence and evil overcome, until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24), until the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

Thanks be to God, for his gift beyond words! AMEN.