

The Waters of Life 20.1.08

Bible reading: John 1: 29-34

Reflection 1:

Last week, the Bible reading, children's focus and message were centred on the baptism of Jesus. We thought about the significance of Jesus being immersed in the river. By going into the water, he was showing his solidarity with people in their need. He didn't stand on the river bank removed, distant, untouched by human life. He submitted in obedience to the will of God, his Father.

References to water occur many times in Scripture, from the Spirit of God hovering over the waters at creation (*Genesis 1: 2*) to the spring of the water of life pictured in what will be our heavenly home, described in Revelation (*Rev. 21: 6*) The image of water signifies spiritual refreshment, the waters of baptism and the quenching of spiritual thirst. Jesus himself said that people who believe in him will have streams of living water flowing out from their heart, meaning the working of the Spirit in people's lives (*John 7: 38*).

Through this service today, the theme of 'the waters of life' will be woven. You are invited to connect with it and let the image speak to you of God.

(Screen presentation of deep-sea diving).

By way of introduction to this presentation, hear these words from Psalm 95: 'In God's hands are the depths of the earth, and the mountains belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.' (*Psalm 95: 4-6*)

Reflection 2:

I trust that as we worship today, you sense God's hand ordering what we do, overseeing it, weaving our different personal life experiences into the fabric of our life together as a church community. Let me share with you a couple of stories of how I have seen that working this week.

In a time of devotions one morning I read this: 'Believe that because you have acknowledged God, you can expect to see His hand moving in your life all day long. Then step forward, knowing that He will keep you on the right path because you have asked Him to do so. Watch God's hand of favour move.' (*Joyce Meyer, Starting Your Day Right, Devotions for Each Morning of the Year, Faith Words, 2004, p20*) I experienced that several times during the week.

On Monday, a man came to the door of the church building late in the day. He was quite distressed and I talked with him about what he needed. He told me that a friend of his had died, and he thought that perhaps someone at the church might know when the funeral would be held. His friend was the son of a member of our congregation. At that stage, I didn't know the details, and as he didn't have a phone, I suggested that he look in the paper the next day. I asked him his name and said that I would pass on his sympathy to his friend's mother when I saw her.

A day or two later, when I visited the woman, she had another friend there, to whom I was introduced. I mentioned the name of the man who had come to the church to ask about the funeral. The friend just happened to be that man's mother. She had not seen her son for several months due to a rift in their relationship. She was overcome to think that he had come to the church to try to find help. She felt encouraged by this. Some would say this happening was coincidence. I prefer to think of it as 'God's hand of favour' guiding our ways and our connections.

The second example is about preparing for this service of worship today. Usually my preparation for Sunday starts early in the week, when I read the Bible passage, think about the theme and do some background reading and research. It lives with me through the week, and as Sunday looms, the final touches are usually done on Friday or Saturday. My prayer is that I will be sensitive to God's Spirit guiding the different aspects of our corporate worship, and helping me express the teaching or the inspiration that God wants to impart to the church.

Last Sunday having referred a number of times to the image of water, I asked whether it would be possible to have a presentation for today about a diver's experiences of the waters of the deep. As the preparations for the funeral were being made, I suggested that we could include a segment in the service today that would serve as a ritual for the man's mother.

I wondered how we would blend the different segments so that it didn't feel disjointed. At the funeral, the image of water was so strong, because of the man's love for nature and the sea. It was in my reflections after the funeral, when I thought about the day, that God seemed to speak to my spirit about the waters of life.

Particularly as one of the songs played at the funeral was Rod Stewart singing 'I am Sailing', the last verse of which goes like this:

We are sailing, we are sailing,
Home again 'cross the sea.
We are sailing stormy waters,
To be near you, to be free.
Oh Lord, to be near you, to be free.

Coincidence? I don't believe so. I see it as another experience of God's hand moving in the experiences of our life. Of God's hand at work in our church. Of God's hand helping me in my preparation.

But it is about recognising God's hand at work in your life. It's not fate. It's not about thanking your lucky stars. It's about having faith in the One who calls you by name, who knows you, who walks through the waters of life and death with you.

John the Baptist recognised God's hand at work in Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John's experience of the waters of life as he baptised people was deepened the day that Jesus came to be baptised. He saw the Spirit come

down and remain on Jesus. God revealed to John, through his receptive, humble and obedient spirit, that this was God's Son, the Messiah.

Nothing is more powerful than the testimony of John in verse 34 of the Bible reading: 'I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One.' (*John 1: 34*) Personal testimonies are powerful because they speak through the particular circumstances of our lives.

The testimony of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well: 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.' (*John 4: 29*)

The testimony of one of the criminals crucified with Jesus: 'This man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' (*Luke 23: 41-42*)

The testimony of the Roman centurion at the crucifixion: 'Truly this man was the Son of God.' (*Mark 15: 39*)

The testimony of Mary Magdalene after the resurrection: 'I have seen the Lord.' (*John 20: 18*)

Your testimony – my testimony. Who do you say that Jesus is? To some, he is just a swear word. To some, he is the Christmas baby, worshipped once a year – or maybe twice, if they remember Easter. 'To you who believe, he is precious.' (*1 Peter 2: 7*)

The most powerful testimony is what you experience in your own life, as you see God's hand at work, carrying you through the waters and calming the storms. Ask God to help you share this with people who only know about coincidences – they don't know yet that those happenings are God-incidents.

The song we are going to sing is a song of testimony, one that has given courage, peace and assurance to many as they go through the waters of life, knowing that they are held by hands of healing and washed by water pure. (*The song is 'I am carried in the arms of grace and love divine.'*)

Lynette Leach

Resources:

Lyrics of Rod Stewart's song, 'I am sailing' on web-site:

<http://www.lyrics007.com/Rod%20Stewart%20Lyrics/Sailing%20Lyrics.html>