

“Water” – Rev. Jennifer Adams

Proper 18, Year A – September 14, 2008

Given that we've been getting absolutely drenched for the last couple of days and that some in our country are in way over their heads, given that this morning in the First Reading the Israelites walked across the sea on dry land while the Egyptians were swamped, and given that we have a baptism coming up later this morning. I think we should talk about water.

So first here are some facts: Each of us is primarily water. In the average make-up of a human being, our blood contains 95% water, body fat 14%, and bone has 22% water. Over all, about 70-75% of each of us is water. Remarkable when you think about it.

And the earth is at about the same percentage about 71% of the earth is covered in water, only 29% land. Now that we have some facts: here's some story: The story of creation starts like this: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless void . . . a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. According to the Story of Creation, our story -- before just about anything else there was water.

Some fact. Some story. Now experience: We see regularly in the news these days – news from around the world - that we can't always control water and more than occasionally there are powerful and painful reminders of that truth. We can barricade. We can build dams and levees. We can stack endless numbers of sandbags. And sometimes what we do to guide the water to control it – sometimes our efforts work, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes there is just too much coming too fast from the oceans or the rivers or the skies and the best that human beings can do, if they have the power and the means - the best human beings can do is get away from the water.

We drink water, we bathe in water, we play in water. We water our plants and our animals and just anything that grows needs water to be alive. Water can be calming, helping to put our minds to rest, like when you sit on the beach listening to the waves. Water can also be scary and demanding of every bit of our attention, like when you feel the 90mph winds off the Gulf and listen to the prediction of a hurricane. The sound of water can mean peace or danger, hustle or lullaby, relaxation, warning or relief. We need water to live. In fact, thousands die each day due to lack of clean water.

So, given all of that it's not an exaggeration to say that in many ways water is life. And trying to put all of this together, water is also mystery.

Imagine that day when the Israelites were at the edge of the Red sea not knowing whether it was an end or a beginning. They had risked everything in order to escape from slavery, behind Moses they had walked away from the oppressive yet predictable way of life under Pharaoh and were headed into the freedom of the promised land. And they were moving, leaving, liberating, until with the Egyptians behind them they had water in front of them. A lot of it, a whole sea of it and they were trapped. And they thought it was a dead end. “You brought us out to die here?” they asked Moses. And then an amazing thing happened. If the Israelites were going to make it either the armies or the water would have to give way. And it was the water that did. God told Moses to spread his hand out over the waters and they parted and the Israelites walked on dry land with enormous walls of water on the left hand and at their right and they made it to the other side. And the water became their doorway to freedom. The beginning of their journey to the promised land.

And so while we can't control water, sometimes God does. Which doesn't mean I believe that God brings hurricanes or tsunamis or floods. I don't know why God's hand appears here but not there – and actually I think that language is probably more about our ways of searching for explanation that it is about God's presence. What I do know that in our

story and in our everyday, water is mysterious, water is necessary and water is also holy. We find it at the beginning and at the middle and at the end.

And so today, we baptize Harley Hendrika into a mystery (the Paschal mystery) with a mystery (water.) We baptize with the most ordinary of substances – that which makes up 75-ish percent of you and 75-ish percent of me. With that which makes up 71 percent of the world we know and with that which we can guide but not control. We baptize Harley and all who come with that which is risky and calming and cleansing and challenging and peaceful and unpredictable and overwhelming and life-giving. It's with water that we baptize into the household of God even while we pray for those who thirst for lack of water and those who evacuate for too much of it. And actually all of that makes sense, in the way that only a mystery – held always in the hands of God can.

Pray that this water may be to all of us a doorway into the freedom and new life for which we long.

Amen.