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Matthew 2:1-12
 Jeremiah 31:7-14
 Psalm 84
 Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19

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 The Baptism of Our Lord

I think it is rather odd that we use a little baptismal fount with a small bowl of water to represent such a life changing sacrament. Think about it...this simple, unassuming bowl of calm water is what symbolizes for us a revolutionary shift in our being. And yet, we pass this fount every week, maybe some of us touch our fingers to the water and mark our forehead with the symbol of the cross but my guess is that more often than not, this fount has become so familiar that we often forget it's even there.

The water doesn't make a sound when we walk by. An alarm won't go off if you ignore it. So ordinary and unassuming. And yet, this bowl of calm water, represents our baptism. Now...if I really think about the meaning of baptism, if I really try to engage the change it means for my life, nothing about my response is so serene and calm.

In fact, maybe the better symbol of our baptism would be troubled water full of rising tides and rough waves. That might feel a little more accurate. Because holy water – when truly effective - is anything but calm. It's anything but quiet. Holy water is dynamic and disruptive. Nagging and persistent. Holy water changes us.

I was traveling in Syria in the late 90's and visited a Coptic Christian church and stumbled upon a rather shocking infant baptism. The little boy – about one year old at the time was brought by his parents. There were 2 or 3 old priests – with long white beards and ornate vestments standing around a huge baptismal fount. As the family gathered and liturgy was said, the child was undressed in front of everyone. One of the priests took the child in his arms and suddenly dunked him head first into the water. Imagine a full sweeping motion as the child was dunked and pulled through that water. Not just once – but three times. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

You can almost hear the baby screaming as he would come up for air each time. But things weren't over just yet. After the dunking and swishing, the old priest wrapped the baby in a towel and anointed him with oil – in his nose, his mouth, and his ears. Imagine more screaming.

The family then walked around the fount in circles chanting prayers. The baby was held up in the air – still screaming. And with little concern for this child's discomfort, the priest and the family then held the baby over a smaller basin off to the side and poured water from the fount all over his body – washing him completely in this disruptive holy water.

It was noisy and raucous and unsettling. It was unlike anything I had ever seen. One of the professor's I was traveling with said it was a fitting baptism for this child who was going to enter a world that would not be kind to him. This child, marked as a Christian in a land who would

oppress him. Life would not be easy. And yet, his parents dedicated this child to a future as a follower of Christ because they believed in the power of God's goodness for their baby.

In other words, calm waters would not have done justice to the radical life commitment that had just taken place. This ordinary water marked something extraordinary.

So how does that extraordinary water impact your life?

That's not meant to be a question to test how good you are as a Christian. It is, however, a question that marks my hope that you will consider the power of this water on your life. Baptism is nothing less than the greatest turning point in our lives...whether you were an infant or an adult when you were baptized. Maybe you haven't been baptized yet and wonder what all of the fuss is about. Whatever your circumstances, this water is a visceral reminder that the grace and love of God are given to you, freely and abundantly. We are simply asked to accept it, to allow this water to wash over us and transform us.

And we need transformation and we need love and we need acceptance. Our world without this water tells us over and over again to not be satisfied, that we need more, we need to do more. So...buy this and you will be happy. Live in this house and you will be satisfied. Drive this car and you will feel like you have made it. We compare ourselves day in and day out to everyone around us. We use our material gain to justify our worthiness and to feel accepted. We strive and we strive for all of these external measures of being the right kind of person.

For our youth, I think it's even tougher. As they scroll through social media they see image after image of the perfect life...the fun parties, the right friends, the coolest clothes, the perfect body. The expressions on the filtered faces they see say to the world I am cool and popular and just enough disinterested in your opinion to show the world that I am the only one that really matters.

Folks, when we buy into all of that we are going to come away feeling defeated and broken and hollow because we will never obtain such superficial and airbrushed markers of worth. We can put on the perfect image on the outside but we will never be truly transformed on the inside. Our heart will still feel empty. It will never be enough. It will never be enough because we are relying on the wrong things to guide who we are and who we want to be.

But if we focus on holy water, on our baptism, our worth is measured by a different standard...we are reminded that we are already good enough. We are already loved just as we are no filters or airbrushing needed.

And when you have been bound by beliefs that you aren't good enough or pretty enough or cool enough sometimes this kind of transformational thinking can feel impossible. If that's the case, I want you to go back to essentials of our Baptismal Covenant (p.304 BCP).

This is what our baptism calls forth in us...

First, put your belief in God even when it's hard and even when you doubt. Just keep coming back to God.

Pray. Put your needs, cares, and concerns out there for God to hold. You don't have to go it alone.

Turn away from the things you know aren't good for you, the things that keep you from loving yourself and loving others.

Ask for God to forgive you when you mess up and trust that God will guide you down better paths.

Look for ways to help others, to seek goodness and caring and compassion for those who are left out, oppressed, and broken. Let God's love shine through you in your words and your actions.

That's the heart of transformation. That's the power of holy water, of your baptism. Let this water guide you and change you. There is a better way and you have been washed with this water because God loves you and believes in you just as you are. Amen.