

Baptism of Our Lord  
Wicker Park Lutheran Church  
Rev. Kwame Pitts  
January 13, 2019

*Grace and peace to you,*

*My sisters*

*Brothers*

*And*

*Siblings in Christ.*

*As we travel,*

*Down to the river*

*To pray,*

*Let's allow the Word*

*To immerse us in*

*Sink us in*

*The Goodness of God*

*Into the many paths*

*The Creator lays out before us.*

*Good Lord,*

*Show us the way*

*O Beloved,*

*Let's go down,*

*Come on down*

*Down where Jesus wants*

*Down into the river*

*In the water*

*To witness*

*And experience*

*Redemption*

*And*

*Love.*

*Amen.*

*(pause)*

Where is there a river, deep enough

Wide enough,

Clean enough

To wash away the muck

That clings to us,

That sometimes we don't even bother to wash away?

*(pause)*

Where are those sacred waters,

That can grab and twist away from our fragile being

Those poisonous elements,

That fall,

Manufactured by the proverbial factories of this world

That spew out enough toxicity

Until we cannot see the reflection of Jesus

In one another,

And therefore

We only can see the ugliness smeared on the surface?

(pause)

And when we do finally allow ourselves,

To be led to the rushing waters,

Will we be hesitant to immerse ourselves,

In its power,

That feels as if the Holy Spirit indeed is physically rushing through us!

Will we run into its healing,

Or will we resist,

Because we know,

With the Waters

Infused with the Holy Spirit,

Empowered with the Word,

Tears and consumes,

That which is illness

Sickness

Revealing

Exposing

Renewing

Our very being,

Into the Light

Of God,

And to where,

The Creator calls.

(pause)

My mother has been asking this same question,

Each time our conversation centers around

This tumultuous time in our global society,

This emptiness of relationship

And community

This disconnect especially among,

People of faith.

“I’m not understanding,

Those that are suffering at the border,

Fleeing from violence and chaos

How anyone could listen to that rhetoric,

Especially calling themselves Christian?”

(pause)

Those have been my questions,

Throughout my faith journey,

Because how we live our lives as human beings  
And how we fail time and again,  
How we break those bonds,  
How we do not live into that baptismal promise,  
Bothers me deep into my spirit,  
Until the answers before me,  
Bring myself  
Into a place  
Of  
Doubt.  
(pause)  
We call ourselves,  
Baptized Christians  
And yet,  
We are denying our sisters,  
Brothers,  
Siblings  
In Christ,  
In Faith  
In Love,  
A sustainable existence.

(pause)

Flint,

1,830 days

And still

No clean water

No clean water to go about daily life,

No clean water,

To celebrate

Baptism,

Remembering Baptism.

(pause)

Haiti,

7 years

And still

There are places that have not been renewed,

Made livable,

And how people still remain,

Without access to clean water

And resources,

And have been forgotten

Is questionable.

(pause)

Puerto Rico,

1 year,

4 months

Without help they need

Without access to resources they need

Without clean water they need,

Are struggling,

To

Breathe.

(pause)

20 days and counting,

800,000 federal workers,

Committed to being a part of the ethos

So that the daily lives of us as Americans

Can go on,

Are now left empty handed,

Without the economic resources

To eat

To drink

To survive.

(pause)

And we have been labeled

As a Christian nation,

That clearly has forgotten

Our Baptismal promise

Our Baptismal vow

Our commitment in the bond,

Through the Water

And the Word

Because of the Spirit

And the Love

Ever flowing

From

God.

(pause)

Those are the questions posed,

By many of the students I encounter

And many of those that I am in community with,

Fighting for the same things,

Not just for my Elders and my People

But for all those who are weary under the oppression

And those who are yearning for true liberation

Fighting for wholeness,

And against the brokenness that comes

When we deliberately distort,



The WORD

And what the Creator God has called us to.

It is the mistrust,

The suspicion

That I have seen reflected in their eyes-

Many who don't want to be involved,

Converted

Or

Baptized

Into something they feel

Resembles

A

Cult.

(pause)

Strangely enough,

The reason given about why many don't want to join the church

And be baptized is,

Because they know it's a commitment!

Imagine that,

People who are struggling in the faith,

Have walked away from the faith,

Hurting from what has been done to them

Through a contorted idea of faith,

CLEARLY GET IT

The ritual of Baptism,

Means

TRANSFORMATION

It means,

COMMITMENT

It is,

A reflection of love,

Unending

From the One,

Who gave us

Life

Through

WATER!

(pause)

And I think sometimes,

We as people of faith,

Feel as if the commitment

Of Baptism

Is only for our checklist,

And our responsibility

To God alone!

In other words,

We rush to get our children baptized,

So they have their reservation in heaven

We rush to get ourselves baptized

So that we have fulfilled that commitment

As spelled out in our doctrine

And dogma

We think that once baptized,

We good,

We've taken care of ourselves,

We have our seat-

AND WE FORGET AND IGNORE,

Those around us

We forget,

Those who are still flailing around in the wilderness

Those who are hiding in darkened corners,

Ashamed of who they are

Fearful,

That they will never live up to humanity's standards

(word/line)

(pause)

And then,  
That Voice,  
That Voice that has the power  
To reverberate into those places in our souls  
Where sometimes light can't reach-  
You,  
Are  
Beloved.  
And suddenly,  
That FIRE  
Which John warns us about  
Ignites!  
That presence,  
Which John proclaims  
In my hands,  
This is just water  
But OH  
HE IS COMING  
TO ERADICATE EVERYTHING  
That attempted to choke the life,  
To disconnect us from  
That keeps us away,

From the presence

Of

God.

And those Words!

You

Are

BELOVED,

Is not only for Christ alone,

But

For

Us!

(pause)

Even when we mess up,

WE ARE STILL LOVED,

God SAW the absolute worst in humanity,

God wept at the ways we had become (word/line)

And so God SENDS IN,

Jesus,

To experience our lives

To be as we are

And as He was Baptized,

THERE WAS THAT TRANSFORMATION

Jesus knew,

Jesus understood

Jesus began that Walk,

FREE

Free from everything that could have burdened Him,

YES

Jesus lived a life as human,

Jesus knows of our pains, our sufferings, our sorrows

Our worries and those pitfalls

But because GOD LOVED HIM,

God enfolded Jesus into a POWER

TRANSFORMED INTO FORGIVENESS

INTO HOPE

INTO PEACE

INTO

LOVE

(pause)

And because God LOVES US,

Just as Jesus was baptized,

So we find FREEDOM

In those same Waters

Because of that WORD

And because

Of the FIRE

Of the HOLY SPIRIT,

WE

ARE

FREE!

(pause)

Through Baptism we are FREED From any constraints

This world

Has over us.

Free!

Free not only to share this Good News,

But then FREE

To GO OUT

And live out that FREEDOM

Through ACTION.

The WORD,

The WATER

The MEAL

The HOLY SPIRIT

DRIVES US

To do,

For others,

Regardless of who they are

Or how they love

Or how they identify

Or how even,

They question faith.

(pause)

There is a group,

Called Ibeyi

Two sisters,

Afro-Latina

Who sing a song entitled

“River”

*Carry away my dead leaves*

*Let me baptize my soul with the help of your waters*

*Sink my pains and complains*

*Let the river take them, river drown them*

*My ego and my blame*

*Let me baptize my soul with the help of your waters*

*Those all means are so ashamed*

*Let the river take them, river drown them*

(pause)



In some way,  
Regardless of how we worship,  
Call out  
Recognize  
And  
Celebrate the Creator,  
We know,  
That through the waters  
Infused with the Cosmos,  
The Word,  
The Power of the Holy Spirit  
Because these healing waters come from  
The One,  
Who created all of this,  
Who loves all of us  
Who has the power  
To shatter DEATH  
No matter what,  
When we call out and weep,  
When we give up those things that weight us down,  
Our very being are carried to the waters,  
As we slip under the waves

We are renewed and brought into the light,

Forgiven

Made whole

And reenergized

To go out,

And

(pause)

*Thanks Be to God.*