

Walk Wet

ATTENTION!

This is not a drill.

People of Muhlenberg, we are currently under a storm warning. I know many have been filled with expectation for this day. Hopefully, you have all been doing what you could to prepare. And now, the skies are opening up. There is a high amount of water and wind. I've been told many are praying as they are caught up in this act of God going on around them.

To recap what led up to this event: The first signs of an impending storm began to take shape in the east, along the Jordan River. We've been told a man identified as John first predicted its arrival. John had long been known for his geological predictions about mountains being made low and valleys being filled. He picked up a number of followers; some of them reportedly were drawn in by his crazy words and actions. They wanted to see what he'd tweet out next.

But eventually, more and more people took him seriously and understood that something big was coming. They began to take precautions, repenting and participating in acts of justice and mercy.

The most recent alert from John was a Red Flag Fire Warning, alerting his followers of the high probability of rapid or dramatic increases in unquenchable fire, particularly near wheat fields. This is a serious threat and calls to repentance should be heeded.

However, the most dramatic event took place at the river earlier today, when a man named Jesus was at the river with the gathered community when a large white bird, who eyewitnesses identified as the Holy Spirit, was seen coming from the sky and landing on him. A voice was heard proclaiming words of affirmation and blessing. It's been reported that this voice was God the Father.

I'm here this morning to update you on what's happening, people of God, because it appears all heaven is breaking loose.

This is not a drill; the risks are real. Getting caught up in this holy storm could change your life forever.

The biggest impact of these crashing waters will likely be on your identity. Attempts to define yourself based on your appearance, knowledge, income, career, relationship status, family of origin, neighborhood of residence, things you've done wrong, or things you've done right, will be thwarted by a new identity, proclaimed by God's own self. "You are my beloved child," God declares.

Just like that day in the Jordan where the heavens could not contain the gospel love of God and just had to spill out over everything, on the day of your baptism God's love spills out over you and claims you as his own.

Maybe you feel like you don't deserve this. Maybe you feel like there's something you should do or something you should have done—or something you *shouldn't* have done—in order to receive this blessing.

But remember, Jesus hadn't done anything, really, before his baptism either. He didn't do or say anything to make it clear that he, as the Son of God, truly deserved this kind of affirmation.

But that's God for you.

Literally. That's God *for you*.

The world is going to try to tell you that you belong to someone or something other than God. Whether it's your job or your school or your family or your sports team or the government, whether it's consumerism or materialism or individualism itself, we get so many messages that try to tell us who we are. There are forces that seek to defy God that are going to try to whisper in our ear that our identity, our worth, is found somewhere other than Christ. But God says, you belong to me, and I love you with a fierce love that will never let you go.

And when those words embrace us, and that promise holds us, we may find that those other forces may try to push back. When all heaven breaks loose, and we are drenched in the redeeming waters and blown with the Holy Spirit's wind—when we are reminded of who we are and whose we are, our entire lives are disturbed.

As one pastor writes, "How does an employer manipulate employees to do their bidding if it contradicts the employees first allegiance to a God who requires truth, faithfulness and Sabbath rest? How does a family that relies upon guilt and shame to control its people retaliate if one of the members begins answering to a higher authority – living their acceptance and belonging that is no longer dependent on the approval of their family? How do education or recreation compete for the attention and affection of a people who already know their purpose and source of love? How does the marketplace get people to buy more and more if those people do not measure their value by the size of their house or make of their car; if those people follow a master who orders those who have two coats to give away one to their neighbor in need?"¹

Indeed, the stakes can get very high when God's claim on us meets a world who wishes to enforce the status quo. We see in the middle of this very story of Jesus' baptism that John the Baptist is thrown into prison for being a truth-teller. In the very next chapter of Luke we'll see an attempt on Jesus' life as he lives out his calling.

When all heaven breaks loose, we need a storm warning, because this is dangerous business. In fact, splashing in the storied waters of baptism leads to near certain death.

Yes, death. As the waters come over us, we drown. For in our baptism we die to the claims of this world on us. We die to the ways we get turned in on ourselves. We turn away from self-centeredness and greed, and all the things that keep us from God. We die to sin and we die to death itself.

And then, dear friends, we rise again. We rise, forgiven and cleansed, to a new life in Christ. We emerge from the waters renewed, restored, and empowered to live the life to which God calls us. We become instruments of God's grace, empowered to live lives of justice and mercy. Liberated from sin and the fear of death, we are free to love, forgive, serve, worship, celebrate, lament, pray, hope, and dream. Washed in the water, we live abundantly, trusting in God's promises and nourished by Christ.

And the beauty of this baptismal journey is that while we are baptized just once, we live into our baptism each and every day. Truly, we "walk wet," as we daily die to our sins and rise to new life. Each day we have a new opportunity for the Spirit to empower us to bear the fruits worthy of repentance that John preached about and that Jesus lived.

So listen up! This is not a drill. All heaven is breaking loose here and now. But rather than hunker down and hole ourselves up, these waters of new life and gusting winds of the Spirit send us out. Remembering who we are and whose we are, we can proclaim the love of a God who meets us in whatever storm we face.

¹ Heather Carlson, "Risky Waters," <http://www.ekkleziaproject.org/blog/2013/01/risky-waters/>