

Look, Here Is Water!

Acts 8:26-40

by the Rev. Dr. E. Scott Jones

First Central Congregational UCC

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There are many stories about water in our scriptures—the Spirit hovering over the waters of creation, the angel revealing a spring to Hagar as she and her son Ishmael were dying of thirst, the parting of the Red Sea for the deliverance of the people, Jesus telling the Samaritan woman that he is living water, and so many more. Let all those other stories resonate with the one I have selected for today, one of my favourites from the Book of Acts about the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch.

Before I read the story, let me give some background. According to the Book of Deuteronomy, eunuchs were forbidden from entering the assembly of the Lord, which was interpreted to mean that they were banned from the temple.

But, the Prophet Isaiah had denounced this exclusive practice. Isaiah declared,

To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,
I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

And so we turn to our story in the Book of Acts where this eunuch is riding along, reading the scroll of Isaiah.

Acts 8:26-40

At the critical moment, the eunuch declares “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from begin baptized?” And the answer is “nothing.” Everyone, including this person cut off both literally and figuratively, will be included within the new work that God is doing in Jesus Christ.

We are nearing the end of our late summer series “The Wonder of Worship” in which we are exploring ways that God uses worship to shape us and make us wonderful. We’ve looked at fire, song, words, and this week water. Water appears in our worship at baptism and the baptistery stands here every week as a prominent visual reminder of our baptismal identity. It is in our baptismal service that I utter the words which have shaped this worship series:

Water is a common and ordinary thing, yet without it, all life would perish. It is a perfect symbol for this event because it reminds us that the ordinary becomes holy in God's hands.

So, the waters of baptism are the clearest visual reminder of this bold claim—that the ordinary can become extraordinary. But how does God use water to do that? What meaning should the water evoke for us?

Water is such a rich symbol that we could explore multiple different meanings. Taking our cue from this story in Acts today I'm going to focus on the healing nature of water. The waters of baptism are healing, saving waters because they restore wholeness to what has been broken apart. God takes ordinary us and makes us extraordinary.

In baptism we are named, given an identity. The bible speaks of baptism as dying to our old selves and being born again, a new creation. In baptism, we are marked with Jesus and become part of the church. We become members of a body, to quote the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, "which transcends every exclusiveness."

In the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, nothing can prevent the eunuch from being baptized. What has been excluded will now be included. What was broken can be restored to wholeness. Every worship service should be a healing reminder that we are included. This is how God gives us a new life and makes us wonderful.

But not only are we included, with our new identity comes a call to a healing mission.

Baptism in our tradition is part of worship, not done privately. And like all worship it is "a call to be(come) . . . fully and authentically human, and to be a community and people who image God to the world" (to quote Evangelical scholar James K. A. Smith). We are called to something extraordinary, to become part of God's work in the world, caring for creation, bringing hope to the lost and broken.

In the story, Philip has the moral imagination to realize that there is nothing to prevent the eunuch from being baptized. We must be like Philip, using our moral imagination's to bring God's healing love to those who are cut off.

The waters of worship heal us because they include us **and** they give us a purpose.

In my baptismal order for a child I give these words of blessing, words that are not my own but borrowed from others:

Little sister, by this act of baptism, we welcome you to a journey that will take your whole life. This isn't the end. It's the beginning of God's adventure with your life. What God will make of you, we know not. Where God will take you, surprise you, we cannot say. This we do know and this we say. God is with you.

Every Sunday when you see this baptistery I hope that you will remember your baptism and be thankful. Remember that no thing or nor one can exclude you. God has loved you and welcomed you into God's own family. No matter what transpires in your life, what happens to

you, or whatever things you do, God will be always with you.

And also remember, that you always have a purpose. Your life means something. Your life is part of the great adventure story of God.

Look, here is water!