

“Time to Take the Plunge”
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
I Lent – 17 & 18 February 2018
Genesis 9:8-17; I Peter 3: 18-22; Mark 1: 9-15

As a small child, water terrified me. Outings on our tiny boat at Lake Malone were dreadful. Well-meaning and responsible, my parents felt that exposure to what frightened me would eventually cause me to fear it less. This thought, along with wanting to make me safer when we went to the lake, inspired them to sign me up for swimming lessons for two weeks each summer.

The teacher was patient and kind, but nothing could spare me embarrassment as my peers mastered the various strokes, while I couldn’t even float on my back. Of course, none of that was anything compared to the high dive. It wasn’t a requirement of the course, but the pressure was intense, almost like a cult, to climb up that that rickety ladder onto a flimsy plank 97 feet in the air, where you jump right out into plain nothingness. But despite that discomfort, I’m grateful for what my parents did. Over time, I started to enjoy our trips to the lake more, because I’d learned that water was not some malevolent force intent upon my destruction.

It probably took Noah and his family a really long time to learn that lesson. Sure, they were saved from the flood by their righteousness in the sight of God, but they had bobbed around for 150 days after forty straight days and nights of torrential rain. And we complain about the nasty stretch of wet weather we’re in. Grateful to have survived this worldwide catastrophe, from that point forward, Noah’s tiny band were acutely aware of the sheer killing power of water

We know its dangers well, situated as we are next to a large river, but there’s a different body of water, miniscule by comparison, that can scare us if we spare it a thought, and those are

the waters of baptism, because we know that once we penetrate the surface, we don't know how deep the waters go, or where the currents may carry us, or what may lurk within their depths.

We often regard baptism as an event, a mere moment in time, but it embraces our entire lives. We sense this intuitively, which leads us to the apprehension that once we submerge there may be no emergence, captured as we are by that primal spiritual force, symbolized by water, yet so much more powerful in its ability to sweep us away to uncharted realms, the wilderness of the waters, where as the only maps used to say, "there be dragons." Indeed, there is a slightly sinister element to baptism, because it brings us into the presence of a holy mystery that by nature both compels and repels us. Peter alludes to this in his first letter, where he explicitly links the great flood with baptism, a power that obliterates the old so that the new, the fresh, the clean, the pure can arise and flourish.

Our observance of Lent offers us an opportunity to scrutinize with greater care not so much our shortcomings as to consider again what we've gotten ourselves into with these baptismal waters of covenant with God, raging waters that grant us a better life and the promise of life everlasting, but waters that erode the very foundation of who we think we are, waters that change us by washing away what we may treasure most but need the least.

Lent is not principally about regret and remorse or the disciplines we practice in the hope of becoming more humble and faithful and aware. Lent is the spiritual equivalent of a little boy scared to death of water, who goes every summer to the county pool and gets in the water to gain a different perspective. That may not be the Lent we want, but that's the Lent we've got, unless we choose to push it away and pretend that the waters of baptism are much less than what they really are.

We need Lent to bring us back to the waters that saved us by killing the sinful part of us. We need Lent to thrust us into the spiritual wilderness, where Jesus went after his baptism by John in the Jordan, so that we can find God and, in finding God, find our own best selves. We need Lent, because without it, we just might succumb to the temptation of sitting on the side of the pool or simply floating on the surface of life.

So let's allow Lent to take us under, deep into the waters of our baptism. Who knows what adventures we might have? Who can say what wonders dwell beneath the surface in the depths of that holy mystery? We've got thirty-six days left; thirty-six days, and counting. It's time to take the plunge. Amen.