"Days of the Week" -- Sermon Series for Lent & Easter

"Day 5 -- Water and Life"
Genesis 1:20-23

Lent 4 Midweek -- March 17, 2004
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls

Texts
Psalm 8
Genesis 1:20-23
Titus 3:3-7
John 13:3-10

Suggested Hymns (TLH)
Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain (149)
Behold the Lamb of God (165)
Jesus Grant that Balm and Healing (144)

I.

Anyone with an sort of interest in science is quite aware that, right now, we have two separate robots that are sending back data from the surface of Mars. The two scouts are sending back pictures of landscapes, digging dirt and slicing into rock. But above all, they are looking for one thing: water. Water means the possibility of life. But if there is no water, then there is no life. That's just the way it works.

Water and life go together on Day 5 of the Creation, where we hear the Lord declare, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens" (Gen. 1:20). Martin Luther, no mean Hebrew scholar, describes it this way: "God speaks a mere Word, and immediately the birds are brought forth from the water" (AE 1, notes on Gen. 1:21). Picture the sudden flurry of miraculous activity: One moment, there are simply empty, placid waters. Then God speaks, and birds of every kind erupt from the waters in order to fill the air; below the surface, the seas are suddenly teeming with every imaginable fish.

Or, let us put it another way to describe the miraculous creation of Day 5: All of this life springs into being when God adds His Word to water.

Compared to previous days, the account of Day 5 in Genesis is rather brief; but the miracle there is one to dwell on: Together, water and the Word bring forth life-birds and fish.

Birds and fish. The Lord Jesus uses those when He teaches about the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 13:31-32, He describes the kingdom of heaven as a mustard seed, which grows up into a stout bush in which the birds of the air nest; so He declares that many people will come to be part of His kingdom from the seed that He plants. And what is the seed He is planting? His Word. A few verses

later (Matt. 13:47f), He likens the kingdom of heaven to a dragnet, in which fish are hauled in and the good ones kept. In fact, remember how He calls Peter, James and John to be His disciples: First, He gives them a miraculous catch of fish-and He performs that miracle by speaking His Word; then He calls them to be His disciples-fishers of people instead of catchers of fish (Luke 5:1-10).

The Lord performs miracles and makes disciples by speaking His Word. In fact, just prior to His ascension, He will tell His apostles how to make disciples-how to gather in the "birds" and "fish" who will be His people: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you… " (Matt. 28:19-20a).

How does the Lord give life to His people and make them His own? By water and His Word.

II.

Day 5 of Holy Week finds Jesus and His disciples eating the Passover meal together. The Lord's death is near at hand, and He has a few last things to accomplish. He is going to institute the Lord's Supper. He is going to teach His disciples a few more things. He is going to pray in the Garden. And then He is going to be betrayed.

When death is near, the one who faces death normally receives special respect. In our nation, a condemned criminal is still offered his choice of a last meal to be served to him. But what does the Lord do that night? He rises from Supper, girds Himself with a towel, pours water into a basin and begins to wash the disciples' feet. Footwashing is not the most glamorous of activities. Far from it: It involves bowing down in front of someone and removing the dirt of the streets from their feet. Kings and lords do not kneel down and wash the feet of others; footwashing is left to the servants, and likely the lowlier servants at that.

So you and I understand why Jesus is washing the feet of the disciples. The Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. Even in the hours just before His betrayal, the sinless Son of God is at work as the Servant to His disciples, washing their feet.

Peter isn't so quick to understand; and, believing Jesus is just too good to be doing this menial task, declares, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus responds, "If I do not wash you, you have no part of Me." This is no ordinary footwashing, and it is the Lord who desires to make Peter clean. Peter reverses and says, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" In other words, "Make me totally clean!" To this Jesus says, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

It's an incident to note on that Maundy Thursday, though we usually ignore it in order to speak of the Lord's Supper. But look what else happens at that meal. Jesus speaks His Word to Peter, telling him that He must make him clean. Then He washes Peter's feet with water, so that Peter has a part in Him. Now, some have gone so far as to say that this is when Jesus baptizes the disciples, for there is no other account mentioned of their baptism. There is much room for debate here, but there are baptismal themes here: Peter is not clean unless Jesus washes him with water and proclaims him clean by His Word.

And then, after the disciples are washed by water and Word, Jesus takes the bread, blesses and breaks it, and gives it to His disciples for the forgiveness of sins.

III.

In both Creation and Holy Week, Day 5 points us to the truth that the Lord gives life by water and Word. Real life to real fish and birds at the Creation; real life in Christ to the disciples at the meal.

So it is on this occasion in Lent that we remember our Baptism, where the Lord gave us life by water and the Word. It is important that we do so; for in a world of daily stress and "what have you done for me lately?," we tend to regard Holy Baptism as something that happened to us a long time ago.

Therefore, tonight, we pause and remember that the Lord does for us in Baptism what He declared to Peter the night He washed His feet: He makes us clean and makes us part of Him.

He makes us clean. This is the joyous announcement of Titus 3. First, the Law: For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another (Titus 3:3). In other words, we were hardly clean before God. Then, the Gospel: But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7). In Baptism, you have been washed clean of your sin. You have been renewed and regenerated. Once, you were unclean and lost in sin. Now you are justified by His grace; now, you have the hope of eternal life because He has saved you. By water and the Word, He has made you clean.

And He has made you part of Him. This is the Good News of Romans 6: Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin (Rom. 6:4-7). Look what the Lord shares with you in Baptism! For your sinful disobedience and uncleanness, you deserved God's wrath and punishment-you deserved death. But Jesus has sacrificed Himself in your place: He has died your death for you. Therefore, in Holy Baptism, He shares that death with you. He joins you to His death for your sin so that you don't have to die for your sin; the worst you ever feel of the cross is a palmful of water on your forehead. Furthermore, if you have died to sin, then you have eternal life. So, in Holy Baptism, Jesus also joins you to His resurrection; and therefore, because He is raised from the dead, so will you be.

Dear friends in Christ, do not forget your Holy Baptism. Your Old Adam dearly wants you to forget, for your Baptism is his death. So be aware that your old sinful nature is hard at work to make you neglect the truth that you are baptized; for once you do, he will strike hard to destroy your faith.

"Am I the Lord's? Do I belong to Him? Does God really love me?" These are questions that arise in our minds, particularly during times when we are troubled, sleepless, afflicted. When the Lord feels far away, how can you be sure that He is still near and still treasures you? At such a time, you do not

want to rely on your own commitment. You do not want to say, "I believe the Lord is with me because I have made Him mine by my doing." How do you know that your doing and your commitment were enough? No, when troubled by such questions, look back to your Baptism. How do you know the Lord loves you and has made you His child? Because on a certain day at a certain place, He used water and His certain Word to say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." He marked you there with His name. He said, "You belong to me. If you ever wonder if you are still Mine, then remember this day; because I have put My name on you and I will never let you go."

At times, a troubled conscience will reason, "I know that God made me His in Baptism. But I also know that I have sinned against Him since. The Lord set me free from the malice and lust, the disobedience and contempt, the lack of love for Him and for others; yet I still have done those things. I have surely disappointed the One who made me His; given my sin, does He still keep Me as His own?" Again, your comfort goes back to your Baptism, where the Lord declared you to be His child. He declares to you this day, "Those sins should rightly trouble you, but they do not separate you from me. Is a child no longer part of the family each time he disobeys? Of course not! His parents still love him and will chasten him, but he is no less a part of the family than he was before. So it is with you: I have made you My own child; and when you disobey, you are still My child and in My family. Therefore, confess your sin and hear the Absolution, because that Word of forgiveness renews the promise I made to you when I baptized you. You are Mine, for I have made you so and I forgive you."

Likewise, cling to that promise of Baptism when death draws near. For so many of us, Baptism and dying are at the opposites of life-one at the beginning and the other (obviously) at the end. But though the better part of a century might separate the two, the first brings comfort when you must inevitably face the second. The approach of death brings all sorts of terrors and temptations; the devil turns the screws because it is his last chance to get you to leave the family of God. So among the questions that may plague a dying mind are these: Will God faithfully deliver me? Will He really raise me from the dead? How can I be sure that that resurrection is for me? The answer is Baptism. The Lord has already shared His death and His resurrection with you there. Are you baptized? Then you can be sure: You already have eternal life. Your soul has already been raised up in Christ, and now it is your body's turn to follow suit.

These are the gifts that God gives in Holy Baptism, and we remember and give thanks for them as we remember Day 5 of the Creation and of Holy Week. Both of those days teach us, among other things, that the Lord gives you life by water and the Word. And so you can be sure this day that, by water and the Word, you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen