

First Presbyterian Church
Psalm 36:5-10, “Waters of Love”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 12/20/2020

This Advent we’ve reflected on many aspects of water.

How water offers us hope.

How water is connected to peace.

How water brings us joy.

Today we will explore the connection between water and love.

The world of Jesus’ day was like ours:

in need of water and of love, and where Jesus went,

life was abundant, verdant, and love burst out

in the most unlikely people, the most unsuspected places.

Where God empowered Moses to bring water out of the desert rock,

God would use Jesus to open springs of living water

within the hearts of all who trusted in him.

In the birth of Jesus to a brave young virgin named Mary

we see the love of God on full display.

The Psalm we’ve read today describes the love,

faithfulness, righteousness, and justice of God in connection to water.

The Psalmist David portrays a love from God that is uncontainable

– it reaches to the heavens, God’s faithfulness to the skies.

God’s righteousness reaches to the highest mountain tops,

and God’s justice extends to the deepest parts of the ocean.

I propose to you that this is the river of love

that came among us in Jesus of Nazareth.

The Psalm also tells us that God’s love is far more than a job description,

it’s not just a distant concept or a rule to be followed by our heavenly Father.

No, God’s love is personal!

And so in v. 8 we read that in the homestead of God we are invited to feast!

Here God is portrayed as one who has taken refugees
in from their long journey and given them a place to belong.

Those who take refuge in God's house also partake
of the abundance of God's table, and in v. 9 we read,
"You give them drink from your river of delights.
For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."

Friends, this Advent, let us drink from God's river of delights!

Jesus is the fountain of life, the river of God's love come among us,
a light within which we are able to behold the light of God!

We've all had to cope to find our way through this year in a variety of ways.
One of the coping mechanisms my family took up
through the month of November was to watch
the Lord of the Rings films
(extended edition, of course,
courtesy of one John Wallick).

Each weekend we would watch half a movie at a time,
and even half a film was still about a two-hour commitment.

One thing that struck me while watching this epic tale
was how much water features in the film.

The best places a person can go in Middle Earth have water –
the Hobbit's home in the Shire, lush with well-watered greens;
the Elven kingdom of Rivendell
has a glorious river running through it.

The kingdoms of men and dwarves certainly have their own honor glory,
but they aren't lovely places to be.

I don't think it's a mere coincidence that water
is much less seen in those places.

And then heading over the mountains toward Mordor,
the world becomes a barren wasteland.

When water is found, it is stagnant and compromised.

What carries them along when they get further and further from
fresh living water, is love.

It's the love of Frodo for his friends, and for the Shire,
that enables him to carry the ring of power so far.

And that love ultimately brings him back to Rivendell,
where the elves invite him to join their boats to float upon a river
to what they call the Undying Land.

Where there is water and love there is hope, and much can be overcome.

Now, I think you'll be relieved to hear me say that the story of Jesus' birth
is not really much like the Lord of the Rings.

But I will make this connection:

Jesus' incarnation was like a river of love that ran in reverse:
God's river of love came from the Undying Lands of heaven
and spilled out into the mortal world below.

It's not supposed to work like that –

we go *from* the world of time and space *to* the place of eternal life, right?

The amazing gift we discover in Christmas is that God's
done it the other way around – eternity has entered into our own time.

At Christmastime the river of God's love flows backward
and as we drink from it, splash about, cleanse ourselves,
and point others to where we found it,
we find ourselves immersed in God's love.

In v. 10 David moves from describing God's character and how Israel was invited
to share in it to petitioning God directly.

Turning his eyes toward heaven, David humbly asks the Lord,

“Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.”

The waters of love are not to be hoarded or held for ourselves, but shared.
They flow outward, connecting to new lands and new people.

I think now of those who are watching this video who lament
the state of the world this Christmas.

And for you I ask the Lord, “Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.”

I think of people who are struggling with their families, battling depression,
people who number among the millions we read about each week
infected with coronavirus.

And for them I ask the Lord, “Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.”

I think of those who cannot watch this video because they lack
the ability to connect to the internet. For them I ask the Lord,
“Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.”

God, we need your river of love.

You know this, and you are the giver of all good gifts.

So as we contemplate the gift of Christ, Immanuel, God with us,
lead us to Jesus who is the headwater of your healing river.