

In this second week of the sermon series, we are going to focus on Water.

Water figures prominently in the Christian world through symbolic acts.

Christ walked on water, transmuted water into wine. In baptism we are symbolically drowned into Christ's death, and reborn into new life. We use water in the ritual of the Eucharist as the Celebrant adds it to the wine, and ritually washes her hands clean.

But water can also be *metaphor* for the Spirit of God, and not just for us Christians. Every single religion in the world uses water as a metaphor for their great Spirit.

Why is that?

Because the same things that are said about Water, can also be said about the Spirit of God: We rest in water and spirit before we are born. Both give us life. If we don't get enough of them, we become parched and die.

Metaphor.

We can't always control where water goes, or what it will do when it gets there.

It's big and unpredictable, but also the one thing every life needs.

Water and Spirit. They can be dangerous. That can seem kind of appalling. So what do you do with something we feel is dangerous? We try and control it. Controlling things makes them seem safer for a while. Or at least it makes us FEEL like they're safer.

But sometimes life with the Spirit is more like the rapids—when we race down the stream, focused on the water, and just try and stay afloat. Just a little bit unnerving.

Do you remember when you first learned to float?

When I was about little, my dad took the family out to Coffin Pond in Brunswick. Daddy asked if I wanted to learn to swim. I was thrilled, until he told me he was going to teach me the dead man's float.

Well I may have been little, but even I heard the ominous threat in learning the dead man's float. At Coffin Pond.

But he told me that the first part of learning how to swim – is to learn how to float and to do this we need to learn to trust the water. We need to learn to relax in the water, confident that it will keep us afloat. That sounds easy—but try telling a small child that the water that can drown us – is something we need to learn to trust.

My brother never learned to float or swim. He could never relax, knowing that the water would hold him up. Nowadays he tries to tell people that he couldn't do it because he had such a low percentage of fat in his body. Mmm hmmm.

Trusting the water, trusting the spirit doesn't come easily for any of us.

When we just dabble our hands in the water, we can push that water around easily. We're in charge. Water is deceptively pliant. Except when it's not. Sometimes it crushes us with the weight of a tsunami.

Sometimes that boat on the rapids gets knocked over, and we are pummeled with water—it seems to be everywhere. And we suddenly realize we are NOT always in control of it. Like water, the Spirit of God can take us *anywhere it wants*. And when we're not steering—that can make us anxious.

When I was 20, I went swimming off the Cape with my college boyfriend. I found myself caught in an undertow—and frantically tried to get his attention each time I managed to struggle to the surface. He waved at me, not understanding what the problem was. Finally, I managed to get out of the undertow. And then I went over to my boyfriend and punched him in the arm.

When I later Googled “how to get out of an undertow”, I discovered that the first rule—to my amazement—was to remain calm. Right. The other key point was to swim parallel to the shore. I found that last point counterintuitive.

Why would we stay in the water if we're in danger of drowning? When we're pulled into the deep? But that's the quickest way out of a rip tide: to remain calm in the water and swim parallel to the shore until you're out of the current.

But if you are feeling like you're in immanent danger, most people try desperately to take the shortest route to dry land—where they are safe and back in control. Forcing ourselves to stay in the water and to swim in the same direction as the shoreline—but not towards it-- takes stronger willpower – not to mention faith—than turning and struggling toward land.

When we're scared of the water, we just want to get out.

A case in point: many of us just want to ‘dip our toes in the water’—when we begin to discover God, or start attending a church. I think one reason for that might be that we know that God's Spirit—like water—is vast, challenging and unpredictable. If we get involved in that “Jesus Stuff” we might be swept away. Or drown.

It's sometimes takes more courage than we have to go deep—even just within ourselves. But as exciting and terrifying as living in God can be – we crave it. When I'm really busy, overwhelmed by quick decisions that need to be made, or too many things I need to concentrate on, and not enough time to ruminate, I know I need me some water.

As potentially challenging as the water can be—being on the water, or IN the water—if the only place I feel completely free. It's actually the only place where I feel completely *me*.

When I'm on the water my brain stops trying to decide, and plan and do. I am focused on the water, and hamster wheel in my mind comes to a stop.

I think the Spirit is tangled up with the analogy of water so we can understand it better. When we are frazzled, we can let the Spirit warm us like a jacuzzi. It can relax us like water lapping against stones. We can keep focused on the vast spirit of God that keeps us all from sinking. And we can finally give up the illusion of control and be content.

Take some time this Advent season to give up shooting the metaphorical rapids. This Advent, let's learn how to float. Let's all of us take some time to remain calm, relax, and learn to trust the water, the Spirit. I don't think we'll even need a boat. Amen.