

**Sermon: A Baptism, A Death, A Marriage, and A Flood****Scripture: Romans 13:8-14****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: September 4, 2010**

---

I just have to share with you this morning how struck I've been this particular week by the precarious and poignant nature of this life that we live as it has been revealed in the events and occurrences that have been going on within and around the edges of our church community.

On Wednesday afternoon, I went to the lake, right down at the Bosch's house with Terri Petrie and Mark Severance, a couple who attend our church. They asked me if I would baptize them before I married them. So the Bosch's in their graciousness invited us down to their house and Terri, Mark, Mark's parents and Margaret Woodruff, who was the Deacon representative for you the wider church, all stood at the water's edge and prayed together. I explained a particular way for them to understand what they were choosing by being baptized; that we all have our own memories and histories, experiences and ancestries that make us who we are and, through the act of baptism, upon our souls is engrafted the life of Jesus Christ, his memories, history, and ancestry, his knowledge and teachings, his suffering, dying and transcendence of death, all engrafted upon them and become through baptism a part of who they are. And the three of us walked out into the lake with a rock face tree-lined bank to the east and the Adirondacks rising in the west and the sun dappling upon the water and I baptized them, immersing them fully in the water, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And we quietly walked back to the edge, Terri and Mark soaked through but all smiles and we all held hands in a circle and prayed together the Lord's prayer.

Later that night a number of us from this community gathered back at the Bosch's house and with Natalia Czar's beautiful harp playing and Judy's Celtic prayers and blessings we looked out over a placid and darkening lake and watched the sun set as the clouds were illuminated in orange.

Friday found me at John and Anne Hancock's house. They don't think that John will live much longer and Anne is preparing to say goodbye to a 63 year marriage and her beloved husband and she is listening to a constant stream of people coming into their

home, both family, friends and some people who John knew but she did not, to express their goodbyes to a man that they loved and respected. There are tears and sorrow there but also laughter and peace that comes from love.

Then, Friday night I married Terri and Mark out at their house in Shelburne, the coming together of two people, two families, whose ancestral lines had not known each other until that evening when they intersected and were conjoined with laughter and joy, dancing and merry-making. As Terri and Mark walked down the steps of the porch where their vows had been taken, a couple of small boxes were opened and a few dozen butterflies flew out in all directions. They had been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, a formulation that suggests that God is one even as God is three persons, that God Godself is a relational presence. And through their marriage, though they remain 2 distinct people, Mark and Terri became one, participating in the very same mystery of the very God of love.

Then yesterday Laura O'Brien, Dave Speidel, Natalia Czar, Lee Minkler and I drove down to Waitsfield to volunteer for the flood relief work. 4 of us were sent to Moretown, where incidentally, Don Maynard's family still lives, and we drove into what looked like a war zone. It was unbelievable to fathom how high the water was and to see all that was left behind and all the houses with furniture piled on the lawn and piles of soggy dry-wall being piled outside. The town was filled with volunteer labor and trucks and tractors and dumpsters and dust and smoke from burn-piles. I stood in the backyard of one man's house in the flood zone before you got down to the river and though I'm sure he has been talking about this for days he graphically described to me the terrifying experience of this raging river almost 20 feet above its normal borders raging down stream with parts of houses and hay bales and cows and trees just flying by and how the town was evacuated into three different locations, each time they thought was high enough but the river kept rising. Even beyond the tragedy of many of those residents losing so much in and around their homes, they contend with the trauma of what felt like an apocalyptic event to them, the world crashing down their once lovely little river. And yet they also expressed their gratitude to the people showing up just to help and they shared around a common meal at the town center for lunch how their little community has become much more of a large family through this tragedy.

And those are something of the images that were present in my mind when last night I turned to the pages of scripture and read the words “owe no one anything except to love one another...it is now the moment to awake from your sleep...put on the armor of light, put on Lord Jesus Christ...love one another. It is in times of tragedy, like a flash flood destroying many of the things you had just dusted or vacuumed the day before and a community coming together to care for each other, or in chapters closing, like a beloved husband of 63 years taking his last breath, or in chapters opening like a baptism and a later-in-life relationship and marriage that you thought would never come, that you realize that, really, love is at the center, love is at the heart of it all, and although we can get so distracted and we can so easily forget and we can feel overwhelmed at times by the forces that are decidedly not of love and although we can be so hurt in our very loving, we still know that in the end, when the chips are down, when all that is less than essential is stripped away that really the greatest presence and power, the most enduring reality still left within, surrounding, above it all is... love. Amen.