

“Take the plunge!” John 21:1-14
3rd Sunday after Easter 4/25/2004 Pastor Jon Bergemann

He is risen indeed! Amen. The word of God for our consideration this morning is found in John chapter 21 (read text). In the name of our faith strengthening Savior, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

So, are you a “toe dipper” or a “body plunger”?

It’s a simple question, are you a “toe dipper” or a “body plunger”? You’re probably wondering what I’m talking about. For those of you who swim in pools, or lakes, or the ocean, etc., are you a “toe dipper” or a “body plunger”? As you enter the water, do you dip your toe gingerly into the liquid to check the temperature? Or do you plunge your body right in?

As many of you know, I belong to the most elite group of “body plungers” around – the Lake Michigan Polar Bear Club. Yes, on January 1st, I have joined other fellow “body plungers” to throw ourselves in the frigid waters of Lake Michigan. But, I do have to admit, even the bravest of us body plungers in this event all share the same fate. After a few seconds of exhilarating jumping up and down, we run out of the water as fast as we can. After all, IT’S COLD!!!! Even the bravest body plungers have to run out of the water after a while. That freezing water is NOT a good place to be.

Let’s extend this question and picture a little broader. How do you approach life? Are you a “toe dipper” or a “body plunger”? Do you run into situations in life with bold confidence, or do you “dip your toe” so to speak, proceeding with caution and care?

I’m sure we have a mix of different approaches to life in the personalities here this morning. But, whether you are a “toe dipper” or a “body plunger” in your approach to life, I’m guessing we all have similar reactions to the “water” sometimes. I’m guessing there are times we don’t like the “temperature of the water”, we don’t like the difficulties of life. I’m guessing that as we deal with such hassles in life as sickness, pain, traffic, bills, hard work, etc., we might sometimes get a little sick of the “water”, a little sick of all that comes with life on this earth. In the end, I think we all share the same fate. We want to get out of the difficult waters in life and find a safer place to swim.

And that makes sense. You see, something has polluted the “water”; something has intruded into life on this earth that was never supposed to be here. That something is sin.

It entered the world when the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, sinned. And it’s been here ever since. The problem? It pollutes the “water”, life, in so many ways.

God didn’t intend for people to die. But sin entered the world, and the wages of sin is death. God didn’t intend for relationship problems, but sin entered the world, and such things as jealousy, gossip, backstabbing, and hatred came with it. God didn’t intend for people to hurt, but sin came into the world, and sickness, injury, fatigue, and broken hearts followed. Sin has made the waters of life very uncomfortable and unpleasant in many ways.

So if we ever get sick of swimming in these waters of life, it makes sense. What we’re really sick of is the effects of sin. And the even bigger problem? That sin isn’t just present in the “water”, in life, around us. It is also in us.

You and I have a sinful nature that rebels against our sinless God. We have a sinful nature that does not want to look to Him alone to lead us through the waters of life. We have a sinful nature that takes our eyes off of his love for us so often.

Think about a child jumping into a pool for the first time. Where is the child’s parent? Well, they’re usually standing right below the child in the pool. They have their arms outstretched and promise to catch the child and keep the child safe. The child really has nothing to worry about. And yet, do you ever notice that the child is not always so confident? Do you ever see the child’s eyes losing focus of his mother or father and worrying a lot more about all the water around him?

Our heavenly Father reaches out His arms to us in His Word, promises to catch and hold us throughout the waters of life. He’s right here (pointing to Bible). But what do we,

sinful children, so often do? We take our eyes off of His arms, and look nervously at all the water of life.

We get distracted from His arms and can become lazy and lax in our daily devotions, in our adherence to the full Word of God. And so our eyes start to wander to other objects to keep us afloat in the water of life. And we can begin to look more to our homes, and yards, and cars, and relationships, and toys, and personal achievements for our strength to swim in life's waters than to our God. In the meantime, we fret about bills, and what we will do on the weekend, and our uncertain futures, and whether Jr. will get along with the kids at school, and we wonder what we can do to solve all these problems while ignoring the hands of our God directly in front of us. While ignoring the certain power and strength and guidance for our lives in His Word. While ignoring the hands which beckon us to put Him #1 and look to Him first for strength in life.

So what would our God have every right to do with our misguided focus and our misguided priorities? Well, he would have every right to withdraw his hands. In fact, he would have every right to push us straight into the turbulent waters of life and sin on our own. He would have every right to let us drown in our sin and suffer in hell.

But he does something far different. As we tremble and try to stay afloat in the cold waters of life, he does more than just offer his arms for support from a distance. He swims over to us and wraps those arms around us. He forgives us. And he strengthens us.

How? How does he do all this? Well, it started when he decided to dive head first into the sinful waters of this world. He, true God, came to this earth and lived a perfect human life in our place. And then, so that we would not drown in the pain of hell, he sacrificed himself on our behalf. He gave his life on the cross to pay for our sins. And then, to prove that those sins are gone and to prove that we will one day be delivered from the turbulent waves of life to the crystal clear river of life in heaven, he rose from the dead. He saved us!

We said that it was the effects of sin in this world that so often make us want to get out of the waters, right? Well by rising from the dead, our Savior guarantees us that we will indeed get out of these waters and jump into the paradise of heaven.

And we said that it was the sin in ourselves that gives God the right to cast us out of his presence, right? Well, by rising from the dead, our Savior guarantees us that our sin is forgiven. That we look perfect in His sight.

Oooh, but we still have one little problem, don't we? It may be true that we are forgiven, that we are going to heaven, but . . . in the meantime, we're still stuck in the turbulent waters of this life. We still feel buffeted by the waves of anxiety, and guilt, and worry so often. We still feel the effects of sin.

It's true. In fact, we're just like some other followers of Jesus who wrestled with sin on this earth, Jesus' disciples. They had heard the good news that their Savior had risen! That their sin was forgiven! But . . . they still had religious leaders who wanted to kill them for believing in Jesus. They still didn't know everything that was going to happen to them in the future (which would include the execution of many of them!) They were still "toe dippers" in many ways as they approached the difficulties of life. They had happy hearts but . . . also worried hearts at times.

So what does Jesus do? He strengthens these "toe dippers". As they are locked behind closed doors in worry, he appears to them once. Then he appears to them again. Then . . . we see what he does in our reading for today.

After a long night of tough fishing, he calls to them from shore and tells them to throw their nets over the right side of the boat. What happens? They catch so many fish that the nets are stuffed full! He repeats a miracle he had done previously to strengthen their faith that He would never leave them. That He would always provide. That they weren't in the water of life alone.

They see him! They recognize him! They are strengthened by him again! And what happens? These "toe dippers" become "body plungers"! In fact, did you catch what Peter (the same guy who ran away from Jesus after he was arrested and betrayed him three times), did

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
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703-897-7373 • www.telc.org

when he saw Jesus? He plunged head-first into the water and swam to meet Jesus! Why did he do this? Was he worried that the boat was going to sink? Did he forget to do his morning work-out routine? NO!!! He saw that his Savior had risen and was still with them! He was overcome with joy! The resurrection made him a “body plunger” in complete joy!

So friends, does it have to be any different for us? No way. What does our God do for us “toe dippers”? Our risen Lord continues to appear to us in His Word. He continues to strengthen our hearts. We continue to sin, but our God continues to forgive us. We continue to face uncertainties in life, but our God continues to assure us that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers can separate us from his love! People continue to hurt us and disappoint us, but our God continues to love us and heal us! We continue to live in a changing world, but one thing continues unchanged, the one thing that can set our hearts at peace. The one thing that causes all these blessings we have mentioned. What is it? The Word of God which shouts in our ears and kick starts our hearts with the news that JESUS HAS RISEN!!!!

Which means what? We can plunge head first into life with joy. When we swim through rough waters, our God swims with us. When we encounter waves, he holds us up. When we feel that the cold waters of life will never come to an end, he takes us to heaven!

Look at Peter! Look at him plunge his body out of that boat and swim to his resurrected Lord! Let’s join him! Let’s plunge ourselves into life with joy. Why not? After all, Jesus jumped into this world headfirst to save us, he rose again, and he will be with us through every wave and worry, every wonder and win of this world! Don’t dip your toe in his love, he has risen! Don’t dip your toe into his Word of joy, he has risen! Don’t tremble at the edge of the water and wonder what will happen! He has risen! Plunge yourself into his arms, and swim for eternity in joy! Take the plunge! Amen.