

**Baptism Stones**  
**Oak Grove Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. Mary Koon**  
**May 29, 2022**  
**Romans 8:31–35, 37–39**

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? God who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN

This week has felt like a year, and the last two years have felt like a decade. Even as we look around us and celebrate our in-person return to this beautiful sanctuary, we recognize that many people that we used to greet are no longer here. Since March of 2020, 33 of our members have joined the church triumphant.

The losses we have faced as individuals, a community, nation and world and many. This week alone we witnessed yet another act of horrendous violence in this country.

It is normal to grieve, lament, to cry out to God.

And that grief and lament are met with the assurances of our faith. Throughout the biblical narrative, we learn of God's love for God's people. And the Apostle Paul offers words to the church in Rome that still have power. In Christ, nothing can separate us from God's love. God is present in all matters of life.

We return to the baptismal font today to remember that we belong to God, whose love is eternal and unconditional. In life and in death, we belong to God.

Baptism is rich with symbolism. In our baptism, we are united to Christ in his death and his resurrection. We are given new life as a disciple, and as we grow in faith, we continually die to our old selves and rise to the new.

Water is the stuff of baptism and the stuff of life. It is essential to every living thing. The bible is literally bookended with stories about water, from the first lines in Genesis when God's spirit swept over the face of the waters, to the waters in Eden, to the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, to Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well, to the book of Revelation and the River of Life where all nations will live in peace. When water shows up in the bible, you can be sure something significant is going to happen.

When scientists study galaxies, they look for water as an indication that an environment might sustain life.

John the Baptizer chose water as the medium of baptism... not olive oil or goat milk. Water was precious in the desert of Palestine and is precious still today.

The waters of baptism signify the unending grace and love of God that pours upon us like an early summer rain. The waters of baptism represent the community that helps shape our identity as Christ followers and doers of justice, mercy, and humility.

As we continue in this strange pandemic/endemic time, and reflect upon the losses we have endured, as we mourn the loss of life of children in Texas, shoppers in New York and worshippers in California at the hands of automatic weapons, as we read with sinking hearts the news from Ukraine and how our states governments are systemically stripping human rights, as we recall the second anniversary of the murder of George Floyd, we need a physical reminder of the love and grace of God that will never let us go. That will never let the world go.

We are embodied beings, and difficult events are felt in our bodies. Faith doesn't reside solely in our brains. We were created as integrated beings- body, mind, spirit. Jesus knew this when he told us to eat bread and drink wine together and baptize people with water, things we can see, taste, smell, touch and hear.

So, in a moment, we will invite you to come forward and leave your stone with a person's name or situation on a rock on the communion table. And then, for those without memorial rocks, we invite you to step forward to the baptismal fonts. Emerge your hand into the water, let it roll down your sleeve.

If you'd like, touch your hand to your forehead or hand, making a sign of the cross. Let the water refresh your weary soul.

Then take a smooth stone to remind you of your baptism, that you are God's beloved. To remind you that you are held and loved by Jesus, our rock and our redeemer. Keep it in your pocket, so when your hand grazes it, you will remember! Let it be a tangible, physical symbol that

God is with us, preparing a way in all the hard times. That beauty, kindness and good still exist.

If you are joining us online, either now or after our worship, get to a faucet or lakeside and splash some water on your hands and face. Go outside, if possible and look for a beautiful stone.