“The Fourth Sunday in Lent is sometimes referred to as Refreshment Sunday. It is a moment in liturgical time when people are invited to ease their Lenten discipline for a day and refresh themselves through feasting and resting. The day reminds us that we are saved by grace and not by our own efforts.

In the days of yore, this same Sunday was known in England as Mothering Sunday. It was a day when servants and apprentices were allowed to take a day off and go home to visit their mothers. That tradition later became linked to parochial life as people made pilgrimage to the church of their youth, their “Mother Church.” On this day, people gathered at the church to play games, eat pastries and engage in various festivities.” (All Saints Church newsletter, Sacramento, CA)

Today, here at All Saints’ Parish, we are being refreshed in many ways. We are refreshed in our worship. We are refreshed in each others’ company. We are refreshed by the music we sing and the voices of the choir that wash over us. And we are refreshed witnessing (with the knowledge of) the baptism of Zoe \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Whenever I witness a baptism, I am drawn back to the church that I grew up in. The “Mother Church” of my youth has a large stone font in the front of the church. It is a large, cathedral-like sanctuary, and so to make sure everyone could see, the font sits on a raised platform, so you must climb several steps to reach it. The font was usually covered with a large wooden steeple-like lid, which swung away on an iron arm, attached to the wall. I always had the sense that Jesus lived in that great big basin. Even today when I pass it, I think to myself – “Hey Jesus, how you doing in there?”

Have you ever noticed just how closely Jesus is connected with water? His first miracle at the wedding in Cana involves water changing into wine. He quiets the sea with the words, “Be still”, just to recall a few. I’m sure each of you has a favorite Jesus and water story.

Once again water plays a part in the healing of the blind man we read today in John’s Gospel. Did you notice that this person, blind from birth, never reached out to Jesus, as so many did, for healing? This man never even knew what was happening to him when this stranger placed mud on his face. Can you imagine? It must have been so startling to feel an unexpected touch, to hear kindly spoken words to “go and wash.” This beggar, a person truly on the edge of all of society, considered deeply physically and spiritually flawed and unclean as a result, suddenly finds himself not only the center of attention, but he can see for the first time in his life.

And for all of the wonder of this healing miracle, the truth of this encounter lies not in the blind man receiving his sight, but in the reality that Jesus is revealed for who he is. It takes some often comical and truly absurd back and forth, and the involvement of neighbors, religious leaders, and parents. And with each exchange, Jesus’ light shines a bit more through the veils of blindness, washing away the mud on our eyes.

A recent reflection in *Forward Day by Day* told this about light. *“The thing about light is that we don’t actually see it. Rather, light is the means by which we see all other things in the world. If Jesus is the light of the world, then he is the means by which we see the world, one another and ourselves. He is the means of our awakening, illumination, enlightenment, knowing and consciousness.”* (3/22/17)

It is no coincidence that the pool of water where Jesus tells the blind man to wash off the healing poultice of mud is called Siloam or SENT. The man washes in the pool, and is indeed sent out to proclaim the truth of the Son of Man. But the man’s knowledge and belief in Jesus does not happen all at once, it unfolds, is revealed over time.

* At first*….“He is a prophet”*
* And then…..“*I do not know if he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*
* And…*.“If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”*
* And finally*…“Lord, I believe”*

And so it is with our Baptism.. In our Book of Common Prayer we learn that *“Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond, which God establishes in Baptism, is indissolvable.”* Baptism is a sacrament of the church. The water which will wash Zoe, making her life new in Jesus, and the oil on her forehead which marks her as Christ’s own forever, are signs we can see that signify the gift of grace from God that she receives at the moment of her Baptism. And that grace will continue to unfold each and every moment of her life.

That grace unfolds for Zoe as learns about God from her family, her Godparents, the members of her church. It blossoms as she hears the stories of scripture. It will become ever more visible to her in the love of family and friends. The light of Christ will illuminate the world for her. And she will come to know she is a beloved child of God.

The Dutch catholic priest Henri Nouwen wove together these words of God that express the extraordinary wonder of being beloved of God. God says, *“I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my beloved and on you my favor rests…I have counted every hair on your head and guide your every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, whenever you rest I keep watch. You belong to me. I am in your mother, your father, your brother, your sister, even in your child. Wherever you are, I will* be. *Nothing will ever separate us. We are one.*” (Life of the Beloved, 30)

Our Baptism does not set us apart from the world; it places us directly in the middle of it. Today as we rejoice in the indissolvable bond we have in Christ with our sister Zoe, together we will pray these words; *“Give to her an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.”* And we will pledge to *“do all in our power to support her in her life in Christ.”*

Jesus is truly in that font with us. Reformers of the Church in the 16th and 17th century emphasized that whenever we wash with water, it is an opportunity to recall our Baptism. A simple phrase, a water prayer or meditation as we wash our hands might be “I am a beloved child of God” or “I thank you God for the water of Baptism”.

In our Episcopal Church of New Hampshire, we proclaim these truths about our lives together: **We Show Up.  We Tell the Story.  We Splash Water.  We Share Food.  And the midst of all that, God Surprises!** I pray that today, we might find ourselves indeed refreshed, renewed, eyes opened, and ready to be sent out to live out our Baptismal vows. May God’s love and grace continually unfold for us and surprise us.

Amen