

On The Mark

Church pastors sometimes need a break from the usual routine, so this past week, I traveled with a group of five other pastors to spend time on the North Shore. We had picked a theme of water, so a majority of our activities and our worship and discussions centered around water.

Our first stop was Gooseberry Falls, always a fun place to experience water. I was shocked to see that there was not a lot of water coming over the falls. The levels were more like late July and August instead of the usual rushing waters of spring. For our agricultural ancestors, lack of water was a dramatic event that changed the course of people's lives. The Book of Ruth tells the story of a family forced to travel to a neighboring country because of drought. Drought up-ended their lives.

Our next stop was the Temperance River. The rapidly moving water has cut a very narrow channel through the rock face. Within that narrow channel are 'potholes' or 'kettles' that are created by smaller rocks getting trapped in a low spot in the rock and the moving water rotates them around like a drill bit which makes almost perfectly circular holes. Fast moving water and too much water are both problematic. Floods are often used as imagery of being overwhelmed in the Psalms, in Isaiah, and other writings.

The High Falls on the Pigeon River, the highest waterfall in Minnesota, was our next hike. The roar could be heard from a distance. As we stood at the overlook in Minnesota, we could look across the river at the very close shore on the other side of the falls and river that was Canada. This is water that divides us. For Christians, we have long debated if baptism could be sprinkled or if you had to be immersed; if you had to be old enough to believe or if you could be baptized as a baby based upon the covenant given to your parents.

Our last stop of the day was a sunset sailboat tour on Lake Superior. While we know Lake Superior can be dangerous, on this day and time it was like a sheet of glass and simply beautiful. This is the more positive understanding of water—water that brings life and sustains us. Water that cleanses and purifies. The water of baptism that welcomes us into the family of God.

In the evenings, we six pastors would sit around sharing experiences in our lives. We shared those times in our lives and our ministry when everything felt dry and wondered if God had abandoned us. We shared the times in our lives when we felt overwhelmed by life and that we were drowning in a flood of grief, sorrow, or other emotion. We discussed how our understanding of baptism caused us to oppose or exclude others. We mainly shared the many blessings we have had in our lives. Even as pastors, we have experienced all aspects of life with God. Our hope is that others have been blessed by us and that we may continue to bless others.

We have all experienced most of these various forms of water in our lives—droughts, floods, division and separation, and all the comfort and nurture that water can bring. Jesus tells us he is the living water that wells up to everlasting life. Jesus is the fountain that never runs dry even though we may experience all the other forms of water. My prayer is that we each would encounter this living water.