

Good morning, Avery and MacKenzie. On this your baptism day, I'd like to tell you a story. Once there was this man named Jesus. He had a cousin, just like you are cousins and you have other cousins. His cousin was John the Baptist who had died at the hands of a king whose name was Herod. It was horrible how John died and Jesus found all this out and was sad. So Jesus wanted to get away for a bit. But people liked to follow Jesus all around, so they gathered a big crowd just to hear him talk. Jesus did miracles! He healed those who were in need of healing and shared his love of God with everyone. It gave people hope and joy and life and they become full of God's spirit. After doing all of that, Jesus still wanted to get off on his own to pray and think about his cousin. But there was that crowd again, wanting to be near him, wanting to hear him talk, wanting to share time together with Jesus. So he did. But then, Avery and Mackenzie, everyone got hungry. So taking a five loaves and two fish, he did another miracle. He blessed the food and shared it with everyone so they could all be fed. Poor Jesus. He must have been very tired at this point. After all the people were fed and taught, Jesus "made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side of the lake, while he dismissed the crowds. Everyone was fed, everyone was going home, but where did Jesus and his friends go after supper? The disciples went far off shore, even though they're rowing into the wind and Jesus is far away from them and separated from them by a few miles of water, weary after grieving, healing, feeding thousands of people. He finally got off by himself. At the beginning of this story, Jesus is far away and the disciples are laboring under their own power struggling against the night winds and high waves. They are all probably soaked, I bet their teeth were chattering and their hands were blistered from their efforts, but they will be ok, Avery and Mackenzie. You see, Jesus doesn't ever leave his friends alone. Today's story proves that. Jesus was far away but then Jesus comes to his group of friends in the middle of the night. He got there by being on the water. By the end of the story, God has come near and they recognize who Jesus is.

I like stories about rescues at sea. Water is everywhere, the waves are stirring up and the sea is active and moving. Water is so important. We need it to be alive. The earth needs it, the seas need it, we need it when we need some cleaning up and we need it to survive. Water is a life force. Mackenzie and Avery, today water is an important part of your life, for in a few minutes you will be baptized. All of us today will give thanks for water of all kinds and we'll sanctify, or bless, water today for your use for new life. It's kind of a sea rescue, through the water of baptism you are claimed publicly as Christ's own forever. Water, today, for you baby girls, is not only a life force, it is a spirit force, the energy of your soul. Jesus will never leave you, God's Holy Spirit will guide you and be your support, you will be fed, and taught and you will become the priority of God's, even when Jesus wants some time off for himself to pray. Mackenzie and Avery, by your baptism, you now are sealed and named as a prayer yourself. We dedicate your life today to God, a living and breathing prayer and blessing to God and from God.

Wow, all of this from a little water. Water that cleanses. Water that gives you the forgiveness of your sins, another birth of sorts, a birth of grace. Grace. That's a God rescue gift word. A life of grace in God is a life of gift upon gift. There may be times, little ones, that you don't think you can see those gifts, or you won't feel that Jesus is near, but that isn't going to be really true. You see, even in the middle of the stormy nights that might lie ahead for you, Jesus will come to you. Even if he has to walk on water, he'll get to you. That's his job, not yours. And when you feel yourself sinking, you'll recognize how he has reached out to you and how he, and his friends, your friends, have pulled you once again into the boat of life. And maybe, hopefully, by the end of your own story, you'll know that God has come near and you will recognize who Jesus is. After all, that's the same story your grandparents, and parents and friends and cousins are writing too. That's the experience of life: the journey of knowing that God has come near and our journey of trying to

recognize that fact. Sometimes, like Peter in today's story, all we can do is to cry out for help. Save us, we pray. Sometimes, like all of us gathered together around the Lord's Table today, all we can do is to say thank you. Thank you for sustaining us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Thank you for giving us inquiring and discerning hearts, thank you for the courage to will and to persevere, thank you for a spirit to know and to love you, and most of all, thank you for the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.

Water. It's needed by all. Our bodies need it, our souls need it. Mackenzie and Avery, remember your baptism. And through your baptism this weekend, may we all remember our own baptisms. And may it make a difference in how we walk out of this building today and be a prayer to God and from God. Amen.