

Waters of Destruction and New Life

Water is powerful.

Anyone who has caught even a glimpse of the news of recent storms has learned something about the destructive power of water.

As the southeast coast of the US recovers from hurricane Matthew, we have seen flooding and power outages, destruction of property and casualties. The damage experienced on the mainland, however, is minimal compared to the devastation of island communities. Nearly 900 are confirmed dead in Haiti, and communities there will take years to rebuild – this is the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, which has been struck by disaster after disaster in recent years.

Yes, water is powerful.

That power can be used for destruction.

And that power can also be used for restoration.

What Haiti actually needs most right now is *more* water – clean water for drinking and washing, to prevent the spread of disease.

Water can hurt, and water can heal.

During dry seasons, all that is needed is a light rain to turn the grass from brown to green, and to save the crops that can feed a family.

Water brings life.

It can restore what is close to death.

When firefighters are called to respond to a burning building, powerful streams of water gush out from hydrants and hoses to extinguish the fires.

Water saves life and property.

It restores safety to a community.

In the movie *Hotel Rwanda*, there is a scene right when the fighting begins to break out in the community, between the Hutus and the Tutsis. A young boy, the son of the main character, is found hiding in the bushes, covered in blood. The family panics, carries him inside, washes him off and gets ready to bandage his wounds.

That's when they discover that the blood isn't his.

The water reveals a physically whole child, in need not of first aid, but of kind human touch and comfort.

Water washed away the fear and brought hope.

In the church, we believe that water can do amazing things. The waters of baptism can bring about forgiveness of sins, redeem from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation (from [Martin Luther's Small Catechism](#)). The sacrament of baptism is incredibly powerful.

In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther asks, "how can water do such great things?"

Here's the answer:

"Clearly the water does *not* do it, but the *word of God*, which is with and alongside the water, and *faith*, which trusts this word of God in the water. For *without* the word of God the water is

plain water and not a baptism, but *with* the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life.”

Water is powerful.

And the Word of God is even more powerful.

Naaman, the Aramean army general suffering from leprosy, discovered the power of water and of the Word of God. As a military foe of Israel, Naaman had an Israelite slave girl serving his household, who had been captured as a prisoner of war. When she learned of his leprosy, she shared her certainty that the prophet Elisha could heal him. The whole story can be found in [2 Kings 5:1-19](#) – but the short version is that Naaman’s leprosy is healed once he is convinced to wash seven times in the River Jordan, per a message from Elisha.

The waters of the rivers of Aram were powerful, beautiful, and life-giving. By comparison, the River Jordan was a muddy stream.

But thanks to the word of God, spoken by Elisha, and conveyed through a servant, the waters of the Jordan gained miraculous power and cured Naaman from his leprosy.

Water healed Naaman.

As did the words of Elisha’s servant.

Water and word.

Just like a baptism, ordinary water has the power to heal and restore. God speaks to us in many ways. Even when we are reeling from the effects of destructive waters, it is worth remembering that God can also use water to create life. The story of Naaman, and our own baptism, assure of us of the healing that awaits all those who trust in God, and the promise of new life that God can bring through water and the Word.