

Water Wisdom: A Reflection

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Reflections

Turn, if you would, in your hymnals to #427.

Tricia wisely suggested that we include this somewhere in the service. I was sort of partial to the Langston Hughes for opening words, and we decided on Thich N’hat Hanh for closing, and sure enough, after I turned in the order of service, and as the week wore on, and I *reflected* on what my *reflections* would be...well, it turns out that this is the reading that was calling out to me.

Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life, to make the ground put forth grass?

This is God talking in the book of Job. It is part of God’s response, after Job has cried out for justice, after he demands an explanation for his suffering throughout the book...God answers in the form of rapid fire questions, beginning with: “Who is this that darkens council by words without knowledge?” (meaning, basically, who is this ignorant person making all of this noise?) and continuing with, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”

So this passage in our hymnal is a continuation of God’s response:

Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life, to make the ground put forth grass?

Who has done this? The intended answer from Job is: not me! The intended answer from any human is: not me! God, here, is pointing out everything that is out of the control, or even the reach, of humans. And in effect, he’s saying, “Silly, self-indulgent humans. It’s not *all about you.*”

Now this might seem like a less-than inspiring message on a day of celebration, but hear me out.

I think this is important, because, in the wake of the tsunami that struck in Asia and the two recent hurricanes on our continent, it's hard to talk about water without acknowledging that it can be a massively destructive force. Whether you see human activities and global warming at work in contributing to the severity of these storms, the truth is that hurricanes happen and that when they do, they are no respecters of persons. We can't count on a storm to change path at our request; we can only protect and take care of each other as best we can. So water can be dangerous...

And yet...and yet, it is the rain, the river, the ocean, the water *that gives us life*. It is not *for* us, and yet we are its beneficiaries along with all other life that we know; it not only rains on the just and the unjust alike, it also rains where there are no people (and there were a lot more places like that in Job's day); it rains, oblivious of our existence, and yet that water contains the magical properties that allow us to exist at all. It feels like a gift. It is the epitome of grace. It is unearned, life-giving power that fills us with gratitude. It is not *for* us, in the sense that it is *intended* for us, and that is what God is saying here. There is more than you can know, human... there is a bigger picture than you can see...It is not *for* us, but we can only exist as its children. We are the children of water. Like grace, it is neither our product nor our plaything, neither something we can manufacture nor something we should waste, or try to hoard for ourselves, or rob from other life, or keep from other people. That would be abominable...unforgivable, right?

I was at the Listening Session for The Governor's Growing Smarter Oversight Council that met in Sierra Vista a couple weeks back. One of the purposes of the session was to provide (and I quote) "an opportunity for participants to talk about the future growth of Arizona and to exchange ideas for how the state should meet the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead." One of the first questions, after we broke into smaller groups, was something like: "What are the things you hope to see in this community twenty (fifty? hundred?) years from now?" A couple ideas were thrown out to general approval, and then someone said, "A living river." A living river. Now a Listening Session for The Governor's Growing Smarter Oversight Council is not exactly what I'd call a religious setting, and yet the words were spoken (I don't know how else to describe it) *reverently*. And I felt a similar reverence in the response of other members of the group. Some people actually closed their eyes briefly as they nodded assent. Some turned their eyes upward, and their mumbled agreement could just as well have been prayers. Reverence.

Tampering with the life of a river may indeed interfere with our very survival in this area, yes! But there was something more than that...Tampering with the life of a river is tampering with something that travels well beyond us into the mystery that is all of life. "I've known rivers," says Langston Hughes. "I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human

blood in human veins.” These rivers are not *for* us, and yet we are beneficiaries of the life they bring. When we honor that gift; when we respond to life from the depths of our gratitude for the grace of existence that is freely given, we find that, like Langston Hughes, we find that our souls have grown deep like the rivers. We are connected to something older, deeper, wider, wilder, stronger than we can begin to grasp, and yet somehow we glimpse it in the current, feel it flowing over our feet, sense it living within our very bodies. Of water and earth and starstuff are we made...

So it is appropriate that water is the symbol we use to dedicate the loving care of this community to two children today. It is appropriate that water is the symbol we use to call our community back to itself, each individual adding their part to the whole. And it is appropriate that we celebrate with water our connection to mystery and our gratitude for the grace that is this existence.