

Season after Pentecost - Proper 8C

June 30, 2013

Haven Lutheran Church, Hagerstown MD

Readings: I Kings 19: 15-16, 19-21; Psalm 16; Luke 9: 51-62

As I read and studied today's challenging lessons, a certain story kept coming to mind. "But I used that story five years ago here," I kept telling the Holy Spirit. "But it's the right story." I kept sensing. So I surrendered and hope it keeps mulling in your mind and soul as it does in mine:

This is a story about some fishes who lived in a very small puddle of water.

"Give me that water bug!"

"No, I saw him first!"

"Get your fins off my supper! He's mine, I tell you.!"

And so, every day, the little fishes would fight. In such cramped quarters, there isn't much else to do - except swim in circles and hunt for water bugs. Their stagnant puddle was cradled between the roots of an ancient oak, just beside a swiftly-flowing river. Life never seemed to change for the puddle-fishes.

But one morning, as they swam in circles and hunted for waterbugs, there was a sudden noise:

SPLASH!

"Watch yourself!"

"Stand clear!"

An amazing, brightly colored fish had jumped into the riverside puddle! This large fish had blue and red and golden scales. And - what was most unusual for this particular puddle of water - he was smiling.

At first, the frightened puddle-fishes huddled together against the puddle's far edge.

Finally, one of them asked:

"Where do you come from?"

The **Sparkling Fish** smiled brightly:

"I come from the sea!"

"The sea? What is the sea?"

The **Sparkling Fish** shook his head in surprise:

"No one has ever told you about the sea? Why, the sea ... the sea is what fish are made for!" He rubbed a golden fin against his nose, puzzled:

"How can I explain the sea to you? Well ... it isn't like this little puddle; It's endless! A fish needn't swim in circles all day, for he can dance with the tides. Life isn't lived in the shade - the sun arches over the waves in silver and crimson! And there are many splendid sea-creatures, such as can hardly be imagined.

"It's endless! And sparkling clear. The sea is what fish are made for!"

A waterbug skirted the surface overhead, but no one moved. Then a pale gray puddle-fish spoke up:

"How do we get to the sea?"

The **Sparkling Fish** pointed toward the large black root that lay close to the river's edge:

"It's a simple matter. You jump from this little puddle into that river and trust that the current will take you to the sea."

Astonishment clouded the puddle-water. At long last, a brave little fish swam forward with a hard experienced look in his eye. He was a **Realist Fish**.

The **Realist Fish** looked down at the muddy puddle-bottom and frowned:

"It's pleasant to talk about this `sea-business' but - if you ask me - we have to face reality. And what is reality? Obviously, swimming in circles and hunting for waterbugs."

A look of distaste mingled with pity crossed his face.

"It's all pie-in-the-sea nonsense. Of course, I sympathize ... you undoubtedly dreamed this up because of some trauma you suffered as a little guppy. But life is hard. It takes a real Fish to face facts.

The **Sparkling Fish** smiled:

"But you don't understand. I've been there. I've seen the sea. It's far more wonderful..." Yet, before he could finish speaking, the **Realist Fish** swam away.

Next there neared a fish with a nervous twitch in his tail. He was a **Scared Fish**. He began to stutter:

"If ... I understand y-y-you, we're supposed to j-j-jump into that river over there?"

"Yes, for a fish who wants to go to the sea, the way lies through the river." The **Sparkling Fish** swam closer. (It is difficult to understand someone who stutters underwater.)

The **Scared Fish's** voice jumped to a screech:

"B-B-But...have you looked at that river over there? I'm just a small fish! That river is deep and strong and wide! Why, a small fish would be swept away by the current! If I jumped out of this puddle, I wouldn't have any control. NO! I just can't..."

The **Sparkling Fish** whispered:

"Just trust me. Trust that the river will take you someplace good ..." But before he could finish, the **Scared Fish** hurried away.

Finally, there swam out a figure who seemed very solemn and learned. (He had been in this particular school of fish longer than anyone else.) The was a **Theologian Fish**.

Calmly, he swam to the middle of the puddle and adjusted his spectacles. Setting down a small shellfish podium, the **Theologian Fish** pulled out a sheaf of notes from his vest pocket. Then he smiled at the puddle-fishes:

"My brothers and sisters, our distinguished visitor has expressed many views which certainly merit consideration."

Then he bowed respectfully to the **Sparkling Fish**:

"However, my colorful friend, we must also concede that those fishes who so gracefully inhabit this humble puddle have also expressed many views which merit consideration. By all means, let us be reasonable."

He glanced down at his notes, and then his smile brightened.

"We can work this out. Why not form [a committee...] a discussion group? We could meet every Tuesday at seven o'clock, and I'm certain that some of the puddle-fish would be happy to bring coffee and donuts..."

The eyes of the **Sparkling Fish** were sad:

"No, this will never do. Talking is important, but in the end - it is a simple matter. You jump. You jump out of this puddle and trust that the river will take you to the sea."

From somewhere above the muddied waters, a sparrow was singing. The light in the **Sparkling Fish's** eyes shone with a bright urgency:

"Besides, don't you know? Summer is coming!"

The puddle-fishes murmured:

"Summer is coming?"

"What difference does that make?"

The **Sparkling Fish** pointed toward the sun:

"Summer is coming. The spring rains filled this little puddle to overflowing. But this puddle is going to dry up someday. No puddle lasts forever."

The puddle-fishes were stunned, but then the **Realist Fish** swam out. There was a dark contempt on his face as he spat out his word:

"That's just like you religious people. When you don't honestly convince people of what you believe, you try to scare them. You're just one of those end-of-the-puddle fanatics!"

He swam away in disgust.

But then all the colors of the **Sparkling Fish** - blue, red, and gold - brightened into a warm glow. He whispered:

"It is a simple matter. You jump from this little puddle, and trust that the river will take you to the sea. Who will come and follow me?"

At first no one moved, but then a few puddle-fishes swam to his side. Together they jumped into the river, and the current swept them away.

The remaining puddle-fish were quiet for a long time.

Then once again

they began to swim in circles
and hunt for waterbugs.¹

When Jesus says, "Follow me," not everyone drops what they are doing and follows. In today's gospel, the Samaritans won't even let him in their town. One man says "I'll follow you wherever you go" but we don't know that he does after Jesus reminds him he will be following a homeless teacher? Another says, "I will follow but I need to wait until my father has died and I've taken care of his affairs and my inheritance." Another says, "You go ahead, I'll catch up after I tie up a few loose ends — say my good-byes." Their reasons for postponing their commitment to Jesus don't seem unreasonable or silly. Yet Jesus, who is often so patient and never coercive, pushes them — therefore pushes us — to ask just when do you imagine *will* be the perfect, the right time to let God be most important, the king and leader of your life? After you get the next promotion? Once the kids are out of the house? When you have your finances and health straightened out? The

Lord who created and loves you deeply and dearly for eternity, says follow me *now*. For most of us it is not a call to go on the road. But believe me, you **are** called each day to follow Jesus and proclaim the gospel in the mission field of your everyday life. “Follow me,” Jesus says. Come live in God’s Kingdom now.

God’s Kingdom? What is the Kingdom? Why God’s kingdom is what people are made for. How can I explain it to you. It’s not like the life you know now. It’s open and eternal, rich with love and possibilities. A person needn’t be trapped in deadening circles, for he or she is freed from the expected and dead ends, freed to dance toward God’s surprising future. God’s kingdom life isn’t lived in the deceiving shade but in the light where you can see in ways you never have seen before, see the variety and splendor, such as can hardly be imagined. God’s truth — God’s kingdom - is what people are made for!

”Trust me” says Jesus “The promise seems outrageous. But the God who gives you the promise, who has the final word even over death, is the One who makes the inconceivable possible. Who will come and follow me? ” And somehow, someway -- “Peter, James, John, Mary, Martha, Matthew, Luke, and countless others made the leap, stepped out in faith, trusting the Lord to take them to the future God promised. And disciples who had not thought themselves capable, found themselves preaching, healing, feeding, leading, loving, giving, freeing, rejoicing as fearless inheritors of the Kingdom come and the Kingdom coming.

And what of you and I? Are there puddles in which we might we be stuck? Are there holy invitations we might be avoiding? Are there fears or false treasure that have captured our hearts and imprisoned us in living that is so much less than God intended? In the Word, the Meal, the community, Christ continues to invite us:

-to lift our sights above that which seems realistic to most;

-to have our courage, conviction, commitment lifted above our small, scared perceptions;

-and to have our faith in the promises of God lifted beyond mere discussion.

Our Lord persistently, lovingly invites you and I to consider the sea, the Kingdom of God, and to jump in faith, into life following Jesus.

This is a story about some people who live in a not so very small congregation. Jesus asks, “Who will come and join me?” It’s a simple matter. You jump in faith and take your place beside Jesus on the Kingdom river road and trust that the Spirit will guide you toward something good — toward life as God intended.

Linda M. Alessandri

END NOTES

1. “Once Upon A Puddle” by Daniel Juniper Source: The Reverend Edward Keefer, Jr., perhaps from a Lectionary Homiletics issue (?)