

Season of Creation-Ocean Sunday

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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This weekend marks an endpoint of summer. If you're into fashion, it's time to put away the white. If you're in school, you'll soon be spending a lot of time there. If you're into beaches, beach season is coming to an end. It will soon require a plane ride to get that fix of sun, warm water, and waves.

Water, specifically oceanic water, is the focus of this first Sunday in the Season of Creation. We, of course, don't have an ocean here in Illinois, but neither does today's gospel reading. In fact, today we heard that Jesus was on a lake. This Lukean text is an iconic call story. It echoed earlier accounts of Moses' call while tending the sheep (Exodus 3), Gideon's call while beating wheat (Judges 6), and Isaiah's call in the temple (Isaiah 6). **All these biblical call stories take someone from their routine tasks and direct them towards God's mission focused on people.** In today's particular call story, we heard Jesus instructing Simon to put nets out in the deep water. Simon eventually complied and the nets were abundantly filled.

What caught my attention in the Gospel was the phrase “deep water” - deep, dark, cold, mysterious water. The kind of deep water where frilled sharks with their dinosaur-like characteristics swim about.¹ The deep water where Atlantic Wolffish make their home in the rocky depths feeding with their jagged teeth on crabs, sea urchins, and mollusks.² The deep, dark, mysterious waters filled with unknown creatures.

Into those unknown waters, Jesus urges Simon to cast his net. Unfamiliar waters can be overwhelming, and our lives are filled with these overwhelming waters. We are overwhelmed by an August in Chicago that was the most violent month in nearly twenty years. We are overwhelmed by candidates’ divisive and xenophobic rhetoric. We are crushed by physical and mental illness, death, disease, destruction, terrorism, and hatred. We are devastated by the destruction of our environment and the carelessness of our relationship to creation. A new job, a new school, a new task, and a new home - they all overwhelm us. The deep, unknown waters are overwhelming.

¹ http://ocean.nationalgeographic.com/ocean/photos/deep-sea-creatures/#/deep-sea01-frill-shark_18161_600x450.jpg

² http://ocean.nationalgeographic.com/ocean/photos/deep-sea-creatures/#/deep-sea03-wolffish-pair_18163_600x450.jpg

When Jesus called towards Simon telling him to fish for people, he must have felt overwhelming. It was something unknown. It was terrifying. Yet, moments before this calling the deep water led to something unexpected. The water where they had fished all night with no luck had now birthed a mysterious abundance from the deep. Something mysterious, even awe-inspiring happened in the depths of the water. Simon's encounter with Christ led to that mysterious abundance and a journey into the unknown.

These unknown places are the same corners of the cosmos that God created. In Job, we heard of the complex and profound mysteries designed by our creator. Words painted a portrait of God creating Earth like a builder. We witnessed the ocean being birthed and constrained. In those sacred words, the mystery of the deep was made known through our God. In the mystery and unknown we are drawn together by the Cosmic Christ. As we read in Ephesians, we are reminded that "before the foundation of the world" (1:4) there was "a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth." (1:10) As theologian John Gibbs put it, "this cosmic view of redemption speaks most to the point of our need. We need to know that our best efforts do not merely rearrange chairs on the deck of the

Titanic. The "grace and peace" (1:2) that came to Christians at Ephesus, and that has come to [us], have their source back before the world began. They come from beyond this world, and for that reason the world cannot take them away. Redemption and forgiveness are not merely an individual matter, for they come from the interconnecting of all things under God's purpose. The Christian's life is not lived in a vacuum, but within the Church and beyond that within the midst of all things."³

Although the ocean is hundreds of miles away, we *are* deeply interconnected to it. Our appetite to consume oceanic life, has led to over-fishing, introduction of invasive species, and massive amounts of pollution. Industrialization has killed coral reefs, fish, and wildlife through pesticides and global warming. Nets used to catch our meals ensnare and kill unexpected wildlife. Plastic bags fly in the air, land in our streams and rivers only to find themselves polluting our oceans. Yet, there, in the depths of the ocean, we experience the mystery of our God. We have so much to learn, explore, and give thanks for in the ocean. But vastness of Earth's oceans is only realized we cannot find a missing Malaysian Airlines plane, or after we hear of another shipwrecked person found in the ocean. We often fail to remember that oceans

³ <http://www.env-steward.com/lectionary/lecta/a-2ch-nt.htm>

cover over two-thirds of Earth, and that the deepest part of the ocean is about twenty-one times the height of the Willis Tower. In the midst this deep water where we can experience the range of creation and the sheer mystery of Earth, there we can find our Cosmic Christ desires to reconcile all things.

So too, we are claimed and reconciled with Christ in the waters of baptism. In those waters we are reminded that there is nothing we have to do to earn God's love. You are loved the way you are. You are cherished. You are set free to serve. Then we are sent out to embody the cosmic Christ. We are sent like Simon to reconcile all things. We are sent to be mindful of the ocean and the animals in it. We are sent to embrace the mystery, to engage the overwhelmed, and to catch all of creation in reconciliation. We are sent to boldly dive into the deep, dark waters of the unknown mystery to embody reconciliation.

What does it look like to begin the process of reconciliation? Well one step in the process is bringing awareness. One group, called Washed Ashore, began collecting trash off beaches in Oregon. These bottles, bags, boxes that use to threaten marine life were transformed into sculptures. The sculptures created now depict some creatures previously threatened by the debris to

raise awareness. One such sculpture is a beautiful Parrot Fish with bright oranges mixed with calming blues and purples. Since 2010 when they began they've collected over 40,000 pounds of plastic from the beaches.⁴

Sure, we're not in Oregon, but we know that our lake and waterways move towards the ocean. We also know that these local bodies of water have their own ecosystems. So, perhaps we can embody the cosmic Christ in small ways here that have a global impact on our oceans. Through that, I pray that we'll begin to see God's presence in those deep, mysterious places.

So there it is – the world and our oceans are vast, deep, and overwhelming. We have participated in and consented to the destruction of the oceans. Yet, there is hope. We know these deep, mysterious, and abundant places are created by our God. Today we are sent to learn from the gift of the ocean, to give thanks for the gifts of creation, and to participate in Christ's cosmic reconciliation. Go and dive into the deep, unknown. Amen.

⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/02/arts/washed-ashore-plastic/index.html>