

January 7, 2018
Baptism of Our Lord

Genesis 1:1-5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1-7
Mark 1:4-11

Last spring Dwayne and I went Scuba Diving off a little island called Bonaire, near the coast of Venezuela. It's an incredible place where you simply pick up a tank of air put on your flippers and jump in the water. You swim out about 50 yards over a field of white sand, white rocks, white fish. The water seems almost barren...until you reach the drop off, an ocean wall that goes down to a plateau at about 150 feet. That drop off is when things begin to change. You get the sense that something is going on in the water.

But you have to get to the edge of the wall to really see. As you swim over the edge, let out a little air from your BC, you begin to float down and look around. It's magical. All of the sudden the ocean explodes with life – fish of every shape and size, from the huge tarpon that swim by to the tiny damsel fish guarding their territory in the coral, a school of trigger fish, a curious angel fish. You simply feel lucky enough to be a part of their world for a while.

If you have ever spent any time under water you quickly notice something...you can't hear very well. At best you may hear a muffled sound in the distance, a boat engine above, the sound of your breath through your regulator but that's about it. Communication is hard and requires that you first make eye contact with your dive buddy in order to point to something in the water. You can't call out to them or have a conversation. They simply won't hear you.

I found this out the hard way on one of our dives. I had the Go-Pro filming the ocean wall. Dwayne was up ahead about 10 yards or so and suddenly I look down and see this huge 7-foot green moray eel swimming right underneath me. I start to scream for Dwayne through my regulator – not out of fear but out of sheer excitement. He kept swimming. I tried to scream some more. No use. I tried to call his name. Nothing. The frustration of him not hearing me and missing this moment was so frustrating. It wasn't until the eel swam into the reef and I could catch up to Dwayne that I was able to grab his arm and point to my new green friend now carefully settled into the side of the wall.

When we later watched the video Dwayne could finally hear my muffled attempts at calling for him. There are times we really just want to be heard. To share the beauty of the moment. To share the gift we have been given. To say stop and look with me because something is happening in the water.

And so it is with baptism. Something is happening in the water and it's something worth talking about.

I am always captivated by the wording in Mark about the moment Jesus comes up out of the water. And since we are talking about the Jordan River, I don't imagine that Jesus got just a sprinkling of water. I like to imagine him being fully immersed, having to hold his breath and

close his eyes in the moment his body is submerged. I imagine him feeling the water all around him, knowing that this moment is holy. That in this moment something is being created, a new life, a new commitment, a beginning.

And then he comes up out of the water and breathes. We are told the heavens are torn apart and the Holy Spirit descends upon him. Finally, a voice speaks from heaven. God's voice telling Jesus that he is beloved. I want you to notice that God waits until Jesus can hear. He didn't speak while Jesus was in the water but waited until his voice rang out, full and clear and powerful proclaiming the importance of what had happened in the water.

Imagine Jesus hearing those words. The words of love and welcome. The words of clarity and conviction. God saying, I am so pleased with you. I am so grateful for all that you are to me. I am overwhelmed with joy in this moment because you are my son.

The thing is – because of our baptism we all get to hear those words. Maybe they don't call out of the heavens the way they did on that day by the Jordan River. But these words are God's promise to each of us and God wants us to listen.

The Psalmist today knows a little about the importance of God's voice. So much so that we hear about God's voice 7 times in this short passage. In fact, you might think God rather chatty. But look closer and you will find that it isn't a state of chattiness that the Psalmist is talking about. It's a state of creativeness. God acting in the midst of the world to build, to grow, to form something of beauty. As you read the Psalm you get the sense that God just wants us to listen, to notice.

Do we hear what God is saying to us? Do we recognize what God has created out of the water for you and for me?

This morning, I want each and every one of you to reflect on the words you need to hear from God. What ways do you need him to work in your life? What ways do you desire to have the waters of your baptism wash over you as a reminder that you are also God's beloved? If God were to speak to you today, what do you think he would want you to hear?

Yesterday marked the Epiphany of our Lord on our liturgical calendar, the day the wise men come to see the Messiah, this new thing that God has done on earth, when the divine has come to us to live among us. It's a profound reminder that God wants to be close to us, to know us and love us. And, today, we are reminded that just as Jesus committed himself in baptism to loving and serving God, we too are called to do the same. That's God's voice calling to us.

And in an email letter you all received this week, we announced that Sally Gunn will be joining our staff as a deacon. In the letter I quoted a statement from our Diocese on the role that a deacon holds which is this...

“Deacons empower others to name, claim and engage the work God gives us all to do. They interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world. Through baptism, all Christians are called to make Christ’s redemptive love known through servant ministry. At all times, by their life and teaching, deacons are to show Christ’s people that in serving others they are serving Christ himself.”

This is so important today as we consider what’s happening in the water. Because a deacon is called to help all of us listen more closely to God’s voice. To remember our calling as Christians. Deacons help us listen and hear and respond.

One of the ways you will see Sally serving Grace Church is on Sunday’s during worship. I want you to notice two things in particular. Deacons traditionally set the table for us each week as we prepare for communion. It’s a symbolic gesture that stands as a reminder that we are preparing our hearts to listen and to hear and to receive God’s love. Deacons prepare that space for us.

And then, at the end of the service, the deacon will give the benediction saying words like “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” They remind us that because we have received the love of God, we are now ready to respond by giving that love to others. We are blessed to have Sally with us and I know she will enrich what we hear and how we serve.

Let Sally be your reminder to listen closely. Hear God’s words for you. Receive God’s love for you. Because you are beloved and there is simply no better response than to go in peace as you love and serve the Lord. Amen.