

Undercurrent of Blessing
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Will you pray with me?

Help us, awesome and peculiar awesome God, to see who you really are and receive your renewal and be inundated by your hope. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, Oh our rock and redeemer. Amen.

Did you know that nationwide, dams are being removed at a faster rate than at any point in history? It's a peculiar fact. And we are witnessing one of the largest dam removal projects in history: the removal of four impoundments on the Klamath River in Oregon. Once completed, the Klamath will run free for the first time in over 100 years restoring 400 miles of pristine salmon habitat. This is part of a movement to renew the once largest the annual migration in our country, historically over one million salmon, to their former glory.

The indigenous Yurok, Karuk, and Hoopa Valley peoples have fought dearly for this change, for they have relied on this fishery for eons and understand the salmon run as a tangible sign of the creator's abundance. One former Yurok tribal chairman said "The Klamath is our grocery store, our church, and our main highway.

Not after the dams were first built, water projections started to fall short, it became apparent that our government could not meet the water rights of the indigenous people, the farmers, and the needs of the creatures which called the Klamath home- like the salmon. In 2022 the government sided with irrigators and diverted more water than ever for agriculture. Seventy thousand salmon died, the largest fish kill in our country's history, bringing that strain near to extinction. Indigenous people, peculiarly, and in an act of

prophetic witness, shipped many of the rotting salmon carcasses and left them on the doorsteps of the Department of Interior in Washington DC.

I wonder, what does all this mean theologically and why is it important to us on baptismal renewal Sunday?

Well, like ancient Israel, the Klamath basin is an arid dry region. Thus, damming or irrigating the land historically was not an option. So, the Israelite people, indigenous nomadic peoples, developed a theology, a peculiar way of living, that required them to trust- trust in the rain, trust that God would provide enough for the day. One theologian says this of the Israelites:

A powerful theological imagination is on display in this creation story: there will be enough if we only take what we need. And the ability to say “enough” of course, runs against the grain of Western economic orthodoxy.”

Today is baptismal renewal Sunday. Today we have the opportunity to come forward to be reminded that God is our faithful provider. Today a reminder that we are a peculiar people who are called to live a life different from most of the world around us. In these small fonts, a few drops water waits for you. The water is a sign and symbol of being a follower of Jesus Christ. These droplets bind us to God’s eternal well-spring, an opportunity for renewal laid upon our doorstep which indisputably affirms Gods prophetic presence. This water calls us to magnificent and ostentatious words. For these words, our imaginations, and the consequences of our actions have immeasurable, divine significance for the world around us.

Psalm 29 delivers. Traditionally this psalm is associated with the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. The words paint a picture that the Creator revealed in the life of Jesus Christ is a ruler of the entire universe. There is no infantilizing Jesus’s true nature here, not minimization of Jesus role in God’s sovereignty or the redemption of creation. Our Psalmist wants us to quickly leave the softened traditional imagery of Christmas and plunge

ourselves into the immensity and awe that is Yahweh for this is a forceful and powerful psalm of praise! One theologian muses that with our modern preference is to describe Jesus with words like “friend” or “comforter” or “companion for the journey”, that:

The fierce images of Psalm 29 shock our sensibilities like cold water splashed on drowsy eyes. - Timothy A. Beach-Verhey

I think he has a point; preachers often spend copious amounts of time describing the unfolding reality of God through the lens of the self-sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, through the servants’ hearts of those seeking to follow Jesus moral example, through the worlds need of a church that welcomes all, includes all, and makes space for all. No matter how much the world needs these kinds of words, the thundering praise of Psalm 29 isn’t meant to speak theological address personal comfort and individual or communal healing. Instead, the Psalmist says:

Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.
The LORD give strength to his people!
The LORD bless his people with peace!

The language of this psalmist is not one of gentle love, but of awe-inspiring power and magnificent majesty reigning over God’s people. This is the mighty theological fortress upon which God’s healing grace can tower.

It is also the case that western Christianity often focuses upon the specific revelation of God in scripture more than the general revelation of God in creation. In the specific written words of scripture, we are promised to find the explicit and express revelatory power of the Living Word of Jesus Christ. General revelation then, refers to the presence of God known through all of creation, experienced through all living and non-living things

that constitute the known and unknown universe. And so, the psalmist says:

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
 the God of glory thunders,
 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
 shakes the wilderness of Kadesh
 causes the oaks to whirl
 and strips the forest bare;

The language of the psalmist clearly favors the undeniable transformative presence of God working through the entirety of creation. For those whose spiritual lives are disconnected from experiencing God the Creator in nature, these words are like cold water thrown in our faces!

I wonder why did the psalmist call forth such grandeur and favoritism? To whom was this scripture being spoken and for what ends?

Well, interesting, the origin of this psalm can be traced back to religious texts from other, older, religious traditions. These words are an adaptation of a Canaanite hymn composed to their god named baal, the storm god. The Israelite people adopted this text into their liturgical repertoire and This is why the beginning of the Psalm says:

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings.

“O heavenly beings” acknowledges that in its prior form, these words came from a tradition that believed in many gods, believed in the existence of many heavenly beings. So, the psalmist developing an argument throughout our text- an argument summed up well by another theologian who says this:

There are many gods, but there is only one God. Yahweh is the only real God, and Yahweh is committed to Israel. He is its source of strength,

12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

Pointing to God's renewal and the business of being renewed to recognize who we are in relation to who God is- this is the work of Baptism. This is the work of the sacraments. Baptism is our sacrament whose foundations are submerged in the life-giving elements that constitute water- elements that themselves are permeated with the love of the Creator, our Lord God. General revelation at its best.

I wonder, given all the forms of revelation around us, why is baptism needed and why would a thundering Psalm be chosen to accompany it?

Two young boys were spending the night at their grandparents. At bedtime, the two boys knelt beside their beds to say their prayers when the youngest one began praying at the top of his lungs,

"I PRAY FOR A NEW BICYCLE. I PRAY FOR A NEW NINTENDO WII. I PRAY FOR A NEW PAIR OF BLUETOOTH HEADPHONES..."

His older brother leaned over and nudged the younger brother and said, "Why are you shouting your prayers? God isn't deaf."

To which the little brother replied, "No, but GRANNIE AND GRANDAR ARE!"

God doesn't need to thunder and crash for any other reason, than we are hard of hearing. We are hard of seeing. We are hard-hearted to the wonder and awe and majesty that floods forth from our One Creator. We forget that we are a peculiar people called to live in a way different from the world around us. We fail to grasp how we idolize other gods or pursue "having more" when so many prophets and peoples have come and laid upon our doorsteps faithful ways to live, encouraging us to trust that we have enough.

And so, this psalmist was a prophet to us who forever ask “Who is God really?”.

And God, in God’s great and merciful wisdom, has chosen to offer us an infinite number of responses for our encouragement. For God is still speaking, speaking until the end of the age, speaking forth with the very rocks of the earth magnifying our deepest theological need.

God is still renewing through the gift of water; the rains that come and go, the snow that blankets the land, the seas that give rise to copious, teeming, swarming life: the drops that grace your forehead are a tangible sign of the creator’s presence- God is renewing all of creation just as the Spirit is in this place renewing us right now.

In a world full of so many gods competing for our attention, this basin calls us to return to the One and only Lord God almighty who’s voice is over the waters, who spirit thunders across creation, and whose will can break the mightiest evil in the darkest of nights- and flood us light, life, and hope.

We live in a peculiar time. But we are a strange people, us Christians, who are called to have powerful imaginations that choose hope over despair, generosity over selfishness, life over death.

Just imagine what great and glorious prayers might come true with just a few drops of water.

Amen.