

Creation 4C WATER  
Peace, Seattle  
June 26, 2016  
Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 104;  
Revelation 22:1-2, John 4:5-14

## **WATER**

During this month long Season of Creation we've been exploring the relationship between our human species and the fundamental forces of EARTH, AIR, FIRE, and WATER. Our goal has been to connect the dots between the LIFE OF THE PLANET and our LIFE OF FAITH.

Along the way, we hope these worship experiences have invited, encouraged, and maybe even instigated a desire in you to take these topics beyond these walls and into your everyday lives...

For the more we study and reflect on the natural processes that make this Earth a LIVING PLANET, the more we come to the conclusion, articulated so succinctly by John Muir, who said of nature:

**"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."**<sup>1</sup>

**Today's focus is WATER**, and the story of WATER on this planet we call home is a complex one, shrouded in mystery. The questions WHERE did water come from, and HOW did Earth come to be the BLUE MARBLE PLANET we know today, have spawned numerous fascinating theories.<sup>2</sup>

But as fascinating as these theories are, we're going to begin with the here and now, because there's no contemporary issue more important than WATER.

In LAUDATO SI', Pope Francis summarizes the current state of water this way:<sup>3</sup>

"Fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Sources of fresh water are necessary for health care, agriculture and industry. Water supplies used to be relatively constant, but now in many places demand exceeds the sustainable supply, with dramatic consequences in the short and long term. Large cities dependent on significant supplies of water have experienced periods of shortage... Water poverty especially affects Africa, where large sectors of the population have no access to safe drinking water or experience droughts which impede agricultural production. Some countries are rich in water while others endure drastic scarcity... There is a growing tendency... to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right."

**The commodification of water** is one of those economic/environmental stories that has largely flown beneath the radar. Over the last three decades water bottling factories have popped up all over the country, and a whole industry has risen up where a generation ago hardly any existed.

That industry has succeeded in convincing consumers that bottled water is better—and better for you—than water from the tap. In 2006, Americans bought more than 60 billion pints of bottled water, requiring nearly 900,000 tons of plastic or more than 17 million barrels of oil, not including the energy for transportation. That adds up to more than 2.5 million tons of greenhouse gases that could have been avoided by choosing tap water instead. Over the past ten years those numbers have only increased.

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<sup>1</sup> John Muir and His Legacy, p. 291. Elsewhere Muir put it this way: "When we try to pick out anything by itself we find that it is bound fast by a thousand invisible cords that cannot be broken, to everything in the universe."

<sup>2</sup> You can read about two of those opposing theories by following these links to Smithsonian Magazine and National Geographic: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-did-water-come-to-earth-72037248/?no-ist> and <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/10/141030-starstruck-earth-water-origin-vesta-science/>

<sup>3</sup> Excerpted from paragraphs #28 and #30 of *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*.

**In Seattle we enjoy some of the finest water of any city anywhere.** The water from the Cedar River and South Fork Tolt River watersheds runs through our pipes, powers our industries, cleanses our bodies, cooks our food, quenches our thirst, waters our gardens, and fills our fountains.

Seattle Public Utilities supplies 140 million gallons of water daily to approximately 1.5 million people in the Seattle area, and at a cost of about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of one cent per gallon, it's the best deal in town. **Other parts of the country aren't as fortunate.**

**Last week a story aired about the continuing drought in the Southwest, where Lake Mead, our nation's largest reservoir, has hit its lowest level since Hoover Dam was built in the 1930s.**

"It's getting perilously close to reaching a level where Las Vegas, for one, would lose 90 percent of its water. That's why the local water utility is spending a billion-and-a-half dollars to punch a series of tunnels under the reservoir."<sup>4</sup> Without the new tunnels, metropolitan areas that depend on the Colorado River, including much of metropolitan southern California, are at risk.

**Smaller snowpacks that melt earlier**, and subsequent reduced water forecasts, are new realities that come with our changing climate. Closer to home, we have our own water stories.

**Waters from northwest rivers have been supporting and shaping life here for millions of years.**

- The CEDAR and the TOLT.
- The DUWAMISH, SNOQUALMIE, SNOHOMISH, and SKYKOMISH.
- The PUYALLUP, the WHITE, the CHEHALIS, and COWLITZ.
- The SKOOKUMCHUCK, NEWAKUM, NOOKSAK and SKAGIT.

**These names remind us that Native Peoples** lived with these tempestuous rivers for thousands of years before new immigrants started calling the region home.

**But the story of these rivers stretches back long before any human habitation.**

Not only do the great rivers of our land return the rain and snow back to the Salish Sea in the grand WATER CYCLE that's so visibly present around us here, they are life-bringing highways, concentrating and distributing nutrients, feeding wildlife, irrigating crops, transporting fish, and shaping the landscape.

**Together they form the collection and distribution system for fresh water upon which all life depends—they are the circulatory system of Mother Earth.**

Last month the Seattle Times published an excerpt from the newly published book, ONCE AND FUTURE RIVER: RECLAIMING THE DUWAMISH.<sup>5</sup> Through photographs and words, the book explores the complicated relationship between the residents of Seattle and their only river.

**Plenty has gone wrong with the Duwamish over the past 160+ years, culminating in the river becoming a Superfund cleanup site in 2001.** But, as the article and book point out, while the Duwamish may be a dirty river; a ransacked, violated and neglected river; it is not a dead river.

"There is abundant loss and disconnection to be found," writes Eric Wagner, "yet every time I settle into a kayak or wading boots and push off and away from the city's hard ground, into the flow of the Duwamish River, it feels like belonging.

"To accept the evidence of injurious human choices that have been made during the past hundred years is to wonder what whose people were thinking and whether we are much different. But to accept the evidence that wildlife and plants and people are at home on the river these days

<sup>4</sup> Kirk Siegler, <http://www.npr.org/2016/06/22/483046553/southwest-heat-wave-causes-snowpack-to-melt-earlier-quicker>

<sup>5</sup> *Once and Future River: Reclaiming the Duwamish*. Photographs by Tom Reese, essay by Eric Wagner (University of Washington Press, 2016).

is to allow ourselves wonderment... “In its present state,” says Wagner, “[the Duwamish] embodies the tensions between man-made and natural, between competing visions for the future, between dying and living.”

Pointing to the caring work that being done to improve habitat and revive the life force of the river over the past 20 years, Wagner concludes:

“I find hope in the possibility that we can transform, that by looking deeper instead of looking away, we can continue evolving in ways that help the river heal and reach its next full potential, whatever that might be... We have put ourselves in charge of Earth and have choices to make.”

**We have put ourselves in charge and we have choices.** Back in April, a crew from Peace made the choice of joining friends from Our Lady Guadalupe and other West Seattle neighbors in a project to improve the flow and cleanliness of Longfellow Creek by removing invasive, non-native species.

That choice didn't seem so big, but the thing about little choices is, when enough people make them, and make them consistently over a period of time, those little choices add up to big differences. The raingarden and cistern project we've taken on is another case in point.

**The resources of this faith tradition in which we ground our lives, its songs and stories, point us toward a future in which water will continue to play a central role.** For the water that touches us in baptism doesn't stay here...it moves with us into every corner, every nook and cranny of our lives. And if we believe John's vision, it'll be there, bright as crystal, when God's dream comes into all its fullness.

The way we remember and use this water matters to us whose lives are shaped by the promises of the Triune God we received in baptism. The liturgy of worship follows us into the rhythms of our lives at home and work, school and recreation, and into the ethics of our social-political-economic lives.

**When addressing new converts preparing for baptism, Bishop Maximus tells them:**

“In the baptism of the Savior the blessing which flowed down like a spiritual stream touched the outpouring of every flood and the course of every stream.

We must be baptized by the same stream as the Savior was. But in order to be dipped in the same water, we do not require the regions of the East nor the river in Jewish lands, for now Christ is everywhere and the Jordan is everywhere. The same consecration that blessed the rivers of the East sanctifies the waters of the West. Thus even if perchance a river should have some other name in this world, there is in it nonetheless the mystery of the Jordan.”

**What St. Maximus knew in the 4th century we are coming to see now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in new way**, that the waters of the Jordan make all waters holy, all streams sacred, and protecting the watersheds and the waters that fill our font—and the fonts of every Christian community around the world—is the vocation of every Christian congregation and community wherever it may be.

**For “we little fishes, after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water.”** [Tertullian]

Let us pray. Jesus, water of life, who called us by name in the waters of baptism, as you offered water to quench the thirst of the women at the well, so quench our thirst with your lifegiving presence. Then, Lord, use us—our hands, our minds, our lives—to protect, restore and hold sacred the waters which surround us here, the waters with which you bring life and blessing to the world. Amen.