

Epiphany 1C  
Peace, Seattle  
January 10, 2015  
Luke 3:15-17  
Isaiah 43:1-7, Psalm 29

## **UNDER THE SURFACE**

**We'd gathered in Leavenworth last July for a celebration marking the 50<sup>th</sup> birthdays of my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, and their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We called it the 125 party.**

Friends and family had come, literally, from all over the globe to join in this celebration, and on Saturday, as the temperature rose toward triple digits, 40 of us headed for a tube float on the Wenatchee River.

After waiting for nearly an hour in the rising heat we finally got our rental tubes and were bused up river to where the float would begin. Then, with life-jackets on and tubes in hand, we made our way down the rocky hillside to the river's edge.

I helped Kai get launched, and then, with sunglasses and hat on, and canteen in place, I launched myself by falling backwards, bottom first, into the tube...

I'd seen others do it; it seemed like the right way to go. But there was a problem—the eddy I landed in accelerated my backward momentum, and moments later I tumbled off the tube into the drink.

**By the time I found my feet, my prescription sunglasses and canteen were gone, claimed by the river. DARN!**

There was nothing to be done. Maybe, I thought, I could come back later with snorkeling gear to search for them. It would be worth a try, at least. After all, prescription sunglasses weren't cheap. But for now, I'd have to ride the river without the benefit of my shades, and as blind as a bat.

At the end of the float I learned I wasn't the only one missing sunglasses—brother-in-law Doug had lost his, too, in much the same way. So he and I began talking about when we could come back and try to recover them.

**And that was what we planned to do, until Stacy, a Leavenworth friend and community counselor, piped in. PLEASE—she said earnestly—DON'T TRY IT. WE'VE ALREADY LOST TWO PEOPLE TO THE RIVER THIS YEAR.**

On the surface, the Wenatchee didn't seem all that intimidating. Especially after the record low snowpack the winter before. But we paid heed to Stacy's advice, and reluctantly let go of the idea of searching the river for our lost sunglasses.

The words of a pastor friend who teaches ocean kayak skills came to mind.

**IN THE FIRST CLASS, I remember him saying, YOU'LL LEARN WHAT KILLED YOU.**

On the surface, shallow waters and hot temperature gave the impression that floating the river would be a piece of cake. But underneath unseen hazards were lying in wait.

On the surface it was all about relief and refreshment, but underneath there were holes and eddies and snags; evidence of the river's relentless mission to carve canyons and wear down rocks as gravity pulled the water endlessly downstream.

**The topic is water today. It's in our texts. It's on our minds.**

WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE WATERS, cries Isaiah, his voice rising above the river's din, I WILL BE WITH YOU; AND THROUGH THE RIVERS, THEY SHALL NOT OVERWHELM YOU... FOR I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL, YOUR SAVIOR.

THE VOICE OF THE LORD IS UPON THE WATERS, thunders the psalmist, THE LORD IS UPON THE MIGHTY WATERS...A POWERFUL VOICE; A VOICES OF SPLENDOR.

**That same powerful VOICE spoke to Jesus at the Jordan.**

YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON, it said, WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED!

**This river running through our sanctuary this morning is a reminder of those baptismal waters, and I wish we could bring the Wenatchee here—or better yet transport us to the falls of the Snoqualmie—so we could experience the power of those waters and the sense more deeply the power that infuses this sacrament.**

Yesterday a group of us showed up with picks and shovels for the next phase of our Westside raingarden project here at Peace. If you came in through the Westside doors, you got a glimpse of the progress we've made. We're working with the Rainwise program because water matters.

Through the project, the rain that falls on our northside roof will be diverted into two 530 gallon cisterns that will slow the water's flow. From the cisterns, the water will flow into the raingarden rather than into the storm drain system.

The upshot is, it will make the runoff more manageable and help prevent storm drain overflow from pushing sewage into Puget Sound. As a bonus, the water stored in those cisterns will water our plants during dry season.

On the surface, water falling as rain on this roof and other roofs in the neighborhood doesn't seem like such a big deal. But behind the scenes we know that rain falling unabated on hard surfaces in these Westside neighborhoods has significant impacts on the health of both our local streams and the Salish Sea.

**Water, whatever form it takes, matters. Every baptism and thanksgiving for Baptism in this space celebrates that fact.**

**But it's not just the water. It's the promise God makes to be in, with, and under the water; God's promise to take this Spirit-infused water and mark us forever as beloved sons and daughters—mark us permanently and indelibly as his children—this is what makes our life in this water a sacred and holy journey.**

We may feel like chaff some of the time—feel expendable, like the throw-away portion of the harvest, the prunings, the leftovers—only good for burning. But when Jesus looks upon us, looks under the surface, he sees that not one of us is a lost cause. And no amount of turbulence will keep him from searching us out until we are found.

The power of Jesus in the world isn't a power to condemn or throw away; it's the power to save, the power of solidarity—of sticking with us, walking beside us, swimming with us come hell or high water. His journey into the wilderness after his own baptism says as much. And his journey to the cross confirms it.

Our own baptism marks the beginning of our journey with him, and there's no better or more faithful or dependable companion than he.

This morning, Jesus shows us that the way forward lies in entering the waters. And in his affirmation as God's beloved one, we glimpse our own affirmation as children of God.

We belong to him. Let's never forget it.

Amen.