

Watershed Discipleship

A Sermon by the Rev. laurel Dykstra

Salad and Cedar Community, Vancouver BC

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Part of the Season of Creation 2017

NOTES ONLY

Territorial acknowledgement—Secwepemc

Hello, my name is Laurel Dykstra. I am the priest in charge of Salal + Cedar, a little church in the diocese of New Westminster, lower Fraser watershed. We worship outdoors all year round and we have a vocation for environmental justice

Salal + Cedar —our name

—Cedar, western red cedar (yellow cedar here) Tree of Life for Coast Salish people used for everything from diapers, blankets, big house, rope for whaling

All kinds of biblical parallels to cedar of Lebanon—way that it is used for purification as well as tree by the water, great favoured nation, all the birds of the air (parodied by Jesus in the parable of the mustard seed)

Salal is a low growing, flat leafed berry bush, grow in the shade but thrive the sun, often a first after a fire - if you have purchased flowers and long after the flowers have died, green shiny leaves —and in fact the harvest for the floral industry has devastated some areas of Vancouver Island and WA state b/c introduced invasives like Himalyan black berries

Name reflects the ideas that we know God in the huge and impressive that inspire wonder and but also in the small, persistent and the ordinary,

This name reflects our notion that the church provides both shelter and sustenance
It also shows our commitment to know what lives and grows in our watershed.

Salal + Cedar is part of a growing movement on this continent called

Watershed discipleship

What is a watershed—Carl did a fantastic job of describing a watershed yesterday,
--it is a naturally occurring water catchment area where all the water drains to a single source. Run-off, creek, stream, river to the ocean. Carl said yesterday, a healthy watershed has a number of different kinds of wetlands where the water is held temporarily so it is not simply sliding over the surface.

Watersheds are naturally occurring divisions –in contrast to things like international borders, or city grids and they are often the places where species change or languages change.

The idea of Watershed discipleship is that we know God and follow the way of Jesus best when we are deeply rooted in and responsible to the physical place where we live. So at S+C we Practice our discipleship regionally through things like—stream clean up, prayers and action along the proposed KM trans mountain pipeline expansion project, learning about the medicinal and food plants that are native to our region, hosting a service for blessing of the bicycles. Our watershed—is the “local” when we think globally but act locally. It and the people and creatures and species who live there are the inhabitants of this little lifeboat.

The other way that we use the word Watershed is symbolically. We talk about being at a Watershed moment. So imagine you are a raindrop poised above a mountain top. You can fall and roll one way down one side of the mountain and become part of one watershed, or down the other and end up in a very different place.

The idea of a watershed moment is one where a small amount of difference at a critical juncture can lead to very different results. So the Watershed Discipleship movement talks about being at a watershed moment in terms of Climate Justice and species extinctions—how we are at a time when our actions could be critical.

So that’s a Watershed

What about Discipleship?—how are we disciples not in some Disney version of first century Palestine, or in England’s pleasant pastures green but here in our watershed

How do we practice our faith, what are the **spiritual disciplines** we commit to?

At Salal + Cedar we focus on three

To know our place

Know our history

Know our tradition

So by knowing our place we become in a sense disciples of our watershed, learning what lives and grows here. I have heard an internet statistic that says most children by the age of 5 know more than 100 corporate logos and fewer than 10 plants.

So we have some activities and curricula to help kids and adults learn the plants in our region.

We run a youth camp for ages 13-mid 20s learn our region and develop skills for change.

How many of you know the 5 species of Salmon in BC? –can you tell them apart?

[-Wilderness Way Lenten practice]

Knowing our history means talking about the various ways that we and our families have come to these Salish territories. Knowing about the colonization history, the migration history, the resource extraction stories of the place where we find ourselves. [–Seward—preemption, Mckenna McBride commission, land and farming]

Know our tradition—rest of sermon

Seminary taught that YHWH religion was different from Canaanite religion One of the things that I was taught in seminary was that the genius, or the difference/specialness of Judaism (and Christianity’s Hebrew forbears) was that the fundamental story was about a God who intervenes in human history. There was a trajectory that started “in the beginning” and moved in a straight line, or an arc –salvation history

Unlike those earth-based, nature focused, cyclical Indigenous/caananaite religions

The reality is not nearly that distinct –the cycles of the seasons, the sacredness of creation, the importance of the natural world—plants, animals, rivers, mountains, fish, birds are pervasive in scripture.

So pervasive that Salal + Cedar curates lectionary blog—reflections on the creation themes in assigned lectionary readings, and only twice since January have we needed to broaden the focus beyond the assigned passage to look more broadly at creation themes in a particular book of the bible.

Today’s readings begin in the wilderness

when we hear “wilderness” we think empty, bad, non-productive

But in fact in scripture we have a very rich wilderness tradition

The idea that we know and find God in creation, that God speaks in the land, waters and animals of the place where we dwell is pervasive in scripture. God is encountered on mountain-tops, by special trees, beside wells and rivers and very seldom in buildings.

In Exodus, the wilderness is where the Hebrew people form their identity, where they learn to rely on God’s abundance and not the Egyptian empire’s system of extraction and slavery—the wilderness is where they get decolonized

Or as the African American proverb has it, after the people are out of Egypt, they still had to get Egypt out of the people.

In the wilderness Hagar sees and names God.

The Psalms, like the psalm today are filled with images of creation. And part of our job in knowing our tradition is not to simply say—oh look a creation image, it must be good—but to examine those images critically asking whose agenda they served and serve,

Elisha, Elijah were wilderness prophets, Ezekiel and Isaiah draw on images from the natural world. And their demand for social and economic justice are often in the language of creation.

Anglican Indigenous Bishop Mark MacDonald says that biblically, when a person gets religion, or wants to get close to God, They get Indigenous. He says John the wilderness prophet, dressed in hides and eating country food is the prime example.

Biblical scholar Ched Myers calls it “going feral.”

In the same tradition John the baptizer is a “voice crying in the wilderness” wild wearing skins and eating “country food”

Later in his ministry Jesus goes consistently away from the crowds, to the fields, to the water, to the hills –for his own spiritual nourishment and places of worship –synagogues, the temp are places of conflict

So while the wilderness is often a place of testing, it is also a Place of divine encounter, a place of communion.

Jan Richardson, the artist who wrote those wonderful words about John the Baptist

*[The Prayer Book of John the Baptist
Is written on
locusts' wings.
Is stained with
wild honey.
Is buckled by
baptismal waters.
Is mostly
pages of wilderness
where prayers are formed
not from what is present
but from what has been
worn away.]*

She says that Jesus went into the wilderness with baptismal water clinging to him and the word “Beloved” still ringing in his ears “This is my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

I want to highlight three things about our Gospel reading:

In Mark, the grammar is important, when Jesus comes to be baptized by John, everyone else is baptized *in* the Jordan but Jesus is baptized *into* the Jordan, and that same word is repeated, the dove descends *into* him and he is driven by the spirit *into* the wilderness—each “into” emphasizing that what happens to Jesus at his baptism, doesn’t come only from heaven but that he is grounded in strength that comes from the water, from the creatures and from the land.

one is that it is the Holy Spirit that sends Jesus into the wilderness—some of the other gospels pretty it up and say he was “led”, in Mark it says the spirit “drove” him into the wilderness. But it is not Jesus’ doing nor is it the tempter.

The other thing that I love is the Mark version includes animals—“he was with the wild animals and angels took care of him” –and it is not clear whether the animals threaten him, or minister to him or both.

So as we come to know our tradition and we come to know our place we see that the wilderness, it is not always safe, but it is a sacred place of connection.

And the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness
I pray that you may find him there. AMEN