

Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water?

Poppa often took us to the spring, a gurgling pulse of sparkling water flowing from a metal pipe extending from the pile of rocks. I don't really recall; was it on Vine St. Spring St? Along with glass gallon jugs and a tubby red and white thermos cooler in his flannel-blanket-lined-pristine trunk, he had a camp cup. An extendable, striped plastic cup, that he'd pull out into shape, and collect a drink for us-cool, fresh sweetness. After filling the jugs and loading them onto the floor of the trunk, we'd stop at Lowertown Market and he'd buy each of us a fudgsicle.

As a young teen ager, swimming in the Atlantic Ocean, I was caught unaware by a large wave. I found myself tumbling underwater and deposited, sand scraped and sputtering close to shore. Spitting out a mouth-full of salt water and a bit of blood from where I'd bitten my tongue, I gathered myself and took a time out on the shore.

Today's Epistle from James addresses pretty clearly how one's tongue can get him or her into trouble, if not carefully monitored and checked. The statements are made: With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come blessing and cursing. The question is asked, "Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water?"

Ouch! This reading is one of those that I have to say, strikes particularly close to home these days while I've been doing my best to "love my neighbor" by complying with numerous rules, regulations and restrictions and there's a need to engage in calling forth fruit of the spirit to adapt to the day-to-day challenges. I wrestle with words, and before I know it, the computer screen that bears countless bad news events, real life stories; murders, voter suppression, inequality in so many areas, destruction of creation...is the recipient of some not so kindly remarks about the subjects that are the perpetrators of the unjust, merciless, selfish, status-quo, what's in it for me "news" that crosses my path.

As I meditate and return to contemplative, grounding prayer, listening to the heartbeat of the one who is the pure fountain of all goodness and life, I am reminded of the value of Holy Silence, a most precious gift...This silence gives one time to measure words and responses, to prepare to speak the truth in love, to plan and implement a non-violent action, or simply understand the need to be still and present in time of need.

Protecting people created in God's image, (that's all of us!) from abusive language of others, is something we're called to do. You might remember the childhood expression, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names(words) will never hurt me? I think it's safe to say, this isn't true. We may have experienced something painful and long-lasting from criticism in a relationship while growing up, in a marital situation where abusive language battered like a fist, as a student belittled by a trusted teacher who should have known better. On a larger scale, we've only to look at the Doctrine of Discovery, written and spoken, to see the desolation and despair as Indigenous peoples were wiped out; how many children of God were lynched because of words of hatred set ablaze by misguided tongues? We've not far to look to find the

teen suicide rate sickeningly high, as evil, bullying, untrue words are spread on social media. Harsh words linger...they can be blunt as stones and sharp as a honed stick, and deadly as snake venom.

While we're not all teachers by vocation and career, we can live as examples of Jesus our teacher. Jesus would have us speak words of love, grace, joy, peace, forgiveness, healing-direct us to make our words sound that way. Having said this, James also teaches that faith without works is dead. Remaining as faithful as possible to wisely using words in an uplifting, helpful manner, there are times when one must step forward and declare confidently, the truth in love. When we see an injustice occurring, a bullying action committed, an untruth, gossip or lie, damaging another- we must utilize our baptismal promise and be sure the dignity of the other is respected. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "...a trustworthy person is angry at the right people, for the right reason, expresses it in the appropriate manner and for an appropriate length of time."

Today's psalm, "speaks" in a different language and it's important, too. While the psalmist is likely describing the sun and the moon, all of nature has something to teach us. What beautiful words!! The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes throughout all the earth...The revelation of such grandeur is a witness for God's love for us.

Gaze up into the expanse of a nighttime sky, the glitter of myriad stars and planets and moonshine; breathe pine-scented air; listen to the ebb and flow of the ocean waves or the chortling of a stream; awesome silence and healing scents and tones are offered for our restoration and renewal. Gifts for which we can and ought to give thanks and praise.

One must also be aware of the groans, sighs, roars, sizzles and crackles that Mother Earth is putting forth. Just as we human beings "speak" when we encounter mistreatment and wrongdoing to another, so does our home, our planet seek justice, healing, repair as she responds to climate change that is destroying her, done so by the appetites of humans who are trusted to be her tender and care-giver. A privileged few use brackish words of denial and bless the Lord for their good fortune, while cursing the lives of those they declare less than, and unworthy.

Jesus says to be his followers we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. One's cross may include painful personal things, but I believe more than that, it means we'll have day-to-day encounters with "the good, the bad, and the ugly" as sobering things strike us. Moments, engagements, visuals, just like Jesus did, that require us to balance times of quiet listening or reflection with expressions of healing, hope, renewal, and sometimes, outrightly loud proclamations that demand justice, mercy, equity. Bridge building, helping to create beloved community requires work-hard and insistent work-sacrifice-Jesus tells his followers: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." A teaching of the first century rabbi Tarfon includes the words, "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it." I pray my words and works and yours, too, are fresh, healing, thirst-quenching, fed from the spring of love. Amen.

