

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

I have a third reading for you this morning, which for me brings together the first 2 readings. It's a parable called "The Fish Who Found the Sea" by Alan Watts.

Once upon a time there was a fish who lived in the Great Sea. He was just an ordinary fish, and because he had never known anything outside the Great Sea, he was not really aware that he was in it. He swam up and down, and round, without ever noticing that he was moving in water. For the water was transparent; wherever he moved, it got out of the way of his nose and yet provided a medium against which he could push with his tail, and so move himself along. Without it, he could never have swum; he could not even have lived, but he was so used to it that, for all he knew, he might just as well have been moving in empty space.

But one day something peculiar happened to him. He began to think how strange it was that he could swim, for here he was moving up and down and around through what seemed to be empty space, and all by his own power. This, he thought, was surely very clever of himself. And then something else happened...He began to be confused in his swimming, and was suddenly terrified lest he should forget how to swim altogether, and drop down into the infinite depths below. At that very moment he began to fall.

Suddenly he realized that there was just one chance of saving himself--- to grab hold of his own tail in his mouth, and so hold himself up. So, at once he curled himself up and made a snap at his tail. Unfortunately, his spine was not quite supple enough, and he missed. But, not to be outdone, he tried again with the same result, so that for some time he whizzed around in circles in frantic pursuit of his own end.

The faster he chased it, the faster it moved away, and this had been going on for a while when he began to realize that he was not getting anywhere, that his life was becoming dull, meaningless and horribly repetitive. But he was much too frightened to stop. He was sure that if for a moment he relaxed his chase he would plunge headlong into the abyss, and so he redoubled his efforts to save himself, in spite of the fact that every moment he became more and more tired and disgusted.

Very quickly he saw that he was in a hideous dilemma: He must either fall into the abyss or go on chasing his tail, and both alternatives were equally horrifying. He was in an impossible situation and...he waved his fins in panic and prepared to die.

In the meantime, the Great Sea had been watching this extraordinary behavior and with mixed feelings of amusement and sorrow, for the Great Sea was as kind as she was vast. She gave all the creatures of the deep room to live and swim around; she never obtruded herself upon them, always retiring generously before their noses and letting herself be pushed by their tails so that they could move along. That was not all, for she had always surrounded them in such a way that she bore them up, and had made herself transparent so that they could see where they were going and enjoy all the wonders of the deep. But here was a fish who thought he swam all by himself, had gotten himself into a panic, and was behaving as no fish should behave.

Therefore, the Great Sea called out to the unfortunate fish, and asked him what he thought he was doing. The fish replied that he was trying to catch hold of his tail and so save himself from falling. "You have been doing that for a long time," observed the Great Sea, "and you are no nearer to catching it than when you started. So why haven't you fallen yet?" "Don't bother me," retorted the fish. "Can't you see I'm busy?" "That's just what I can see," said the Great Sea patiently. "But apparently you can't. You haven't caught your tail; you haven't fallen into the abyss; and yet you are still busy. How does this happen?" "Oh, don't be stupid!" snapped the fish. "Of course I haven't fallen down because I'm---Good God!-- because I'm swimming!" "You may well say good God," said the Great Sea, "for how does it happen that you have stayed afloat and been able to swim during all this absurd performance?"

This was too much for the fish. He stopped his chase, and looked around to see who was talking to him. There was no one to be seen, and....it was strange, but although he wasn't doing anything himself, he was still floating in the water, but it seemed to him as if he were suspended by some invisible force in empty space.

"There now," said the Great Sea. "You thought you were doing it all yourself, and you never knew that I hold you up all the time. For I am the one in whom you live and swim and are able to be a fish, and to you I have given the height and the depth, and the length and the breadth of myself in which to swim. I have given all of myself to you, and yet you have forgotten me and wasted yourself in pursuing your own end.

From that moment, the fish was happier than any other fish in the seven seas, and setting his own end behind him, where it belonged, he set out to explore the ends of the Sea. And he found that whether he moved up or down, to the left or to the right, everywhere the Great Sea expanded before him and supported him, so much so that he swooped and climbed and danced in joy, a creature in his own element, out of himself and into the water, where, indeed he had been all the time.

This is a lovely story and it came to mind as I thought about the connections between the scriptures this morning. Our gospel reading is the continuation of last week's where Jesus gives them a heads up that he will be leaving them – in this week's text he reiterates the message that the disciples will be able to find him when he's gone . . . but they remain confused . . . they are still trying to understand what it is they already know. The Acts passage literally takes up the story – let's say – a couple dozen chapters later and we see Paul telling the council in Athens what the disciples had yet to figure out, that God is everywhere – in God we live and move, and have our being, like the little fish – and that means we can connect with God and experience the Kingdom of Heaven wherever we are. The disciples are still learning this and trying to figure out how to trust it.

Last week we talked about some ways in which we see glimpses into the Kingdom of Heaven in the midst of our lives . . . and acts of service, where justice is done, moments of true vulnerability . . . and in personal practices like meditation or centering prayer. During this COVID season, when social norms are reconfigured to make more space for our common humanity, perhaps the Kingdom of Heaven is easier to see, or we have opportunity to see it a little more often. What does it mean for you to trust it? What does that require? For the disciples and for us, we are not left to sort this out on our own - we have an advocate,

the Spirit to help and guide us on the way. I'm going to leave you this morning with these questions. Thanks be to God.