

**Bible Study**  
**Epiphany 1, Year C**  
**January 10, 2016**

**[RCL] Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

**Isaiah 42:1-7**

This passage speaks particularly strongly to the themes of creation and being chosen by God. The Hebrew people knew the stories of creation by heart. They knew the stories of their ancestors. So when the prophet Isaiah says, “Thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear...you are mine,” it is a call to remember those narratives. It is a call to remember who we are and where we come from. In the Christian story, that means acknowledging our baptisms. Interestingly enough, as displayed in this passage, water is also an integral party of the story of God’s people. The Red Sea, Jacob’s Well, the River Jordan, the Sea of Galilee. Water is a necessary part of all of our lives.

- In what ways has water played a significant role in your own life?
- Can you find any links between those moments and the reminder that Isaiah gives us of who we are and where we come from? What are they?

**Psalm 29**

The world is busy. The world is noisy. The world demands our attention with its screens and data and clamor. In today’s Psalm, we are directed to what is truly worthy of our attention and devotion. The Lord, Creator and Sustainer of all, reigns over all of creation and cries out in splendor for peace.

- How do we start to ascribe glory and strength, worship and beauty, to the Lord instead of to worldly things?
- How can we listen for the voice of the Lord above the din of the world?

**Acts 8:14-17**

This story of Acts holds considerable weight for the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. We as humans are made to be in community. God made us in community. So it is important to meditate on the ways the church, even from its earliest beginnings, necessitated a gathering of people. This is especially important in baptism. The Holy Spirit is present within the church as we are baptized and baptize others.

- In what ways is the Holy Spirit present in your life and in your church, especially in relation to your baptismal vows?
- Could you live into your baptism without being in a community? Why or why not?

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

Two pieces of this passage really stand out. First, on this occasion of the Baptism of our Lord (as the lectionary calls it), we are confronted with a very abrupt and honest answer from John to the people all around. John is not the Messiah. The Messiah is coming, and he will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He will gather the wheat into his granary. But here’s the rough edge: this passage also says he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. If this were the only message in the bible about the ministry of Jesus, we would be hard pressed to find Good News in that. But the rest of the Gospels tell us of a Messiah who cares for the poor, feeds the hungry,

and clothes the naked. He talks and eats with the outcasts, the lame, and the rejected. Here, John may be changing our understanding of what ‘chaff’ actually means so that it is not a negative or derogatory term. Instead it is the place where Jesus is needed most and spends the most time. If we look at it that way, he is saying that baptism by the Holy Spirit and by fire is for all people, *especially* the chaff. The second thing that stands out is the voice of God that comes from the heavens. The Gospel is very explicit in stating that not just Jesus was baptized there, but that ALL the people were baptized. God is well pleased, not just with Jesus, but with you. You are beloved. You are a child of God. As you meditate on that, try to think of all the ways that you can recognize the pleasing embrace of God in your life.

- What is your understanding of chaff?
- How might this understanding be changed by the message of the Gospel?
- How can you recognize the pleasing embrace of God in your life?

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