

-I remember in elementary school, I was fascinated in science class by this sea creature called an Anemone. “How can something like that exist?”, my 6 year old brain kept wondering. It had these crazy rubber like antennas that would float in the current. Then it would sting other fish for it’s prey EXCEPT for this interesting looking fish called a clownfish. The clownfish and the anemone, as I learned from our science teacher, had what one would call a “mutualistic relationship”. The clownfish grows this special mucus that allows it to become immune to the stings of the anemone's tentacles and actually lives in the anemone keeping it clean and even at times helping lead other fish to it to be it’s prey. The anemone, in turn, provides safety from the otherwise vulnerable clownfish, gives the fish a food source by cleaning it’s tentacles, and becomes a great place for the fish to lay it’s eggs and reproduce. These mutualistic relationships or “symbiosis”, are incredibly common throughout the natural world: relationships that benefit both parties are what one scientific website stated as “crossroads of life.” Nature is full of “crossroads of life”: where two things come together to deepen and create life.

-Perhaps seeing this baptismal gospel text reading (now for the second week/second time for some of you) as a “crossroads of life” can open it up in new ways. It has for me this last week.

-”John would have prevented [Jesus], saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.’ Then [John] consented.” The water here importantly becomes a vehicle for two things to intersect: God and humanity. It is in a huge way a “crossroads of life.”

-For Lutherans, this is a great way to understand our sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. For many of us (at least it has been for me), the word “sacrament” is a word that many of us learn at a young age, but can never remember really what it means. (kinda like *photosynthesis* or something)

-For Luther, a sacrament is a “sacred act of divine institution” or in other words, where God acts and exists in certain ways we can understand. *Sacramentum* (Latin) means “solemn promise”, or *where God promises to show up*. Luther’s famous saying is that God shows up: “in, with, and under” the bread and wine of Holy Communion as well as in, with, and under the water of Holy Baptism.” Thus, the very basic nature of a sacrament is simply: a crossroads. A time when both humanity and the divine show up.

-This, I think, is a great question to ponder: where are the crossroads in your life? Where do you and the divine show up together?

-I think the church through the centuries has closed off the nature of sacrament in some ways. Sacrament is only defined as these two things (if you are Lutheran) or these seven things (if you are Roman Catholic). I will come to the defense of the church here and say, yes, these things are sacraments because we, as humanity, cross the divine in a very specific and holy way. The Greek Orthodox church speaks of sacraments using

this same baptism story except from the book of Mark which says more specifically after Jesus was baptised that the heavens were “schizmenous” (ripped) open (where we get the word schism from). Orthodox theologians use this word in defining the unique nature of baptism and holy communion by saying that these acts are specific rips in time and place where God promises to come and meet us. I think this is pretty awesome!

-But here’s the thing: there can be other rips in time and place too. There are other crossroads where maybe you personally feel God shows up for you. God doesn’t just show up in the water of baptism and say “well, that was fun. See you at the next Holy Communion!” Maybe we need to broaden and even personalize *sacramentum* “solemn promise” for ourselves. Yes, we as a church acknowledge the specific crossroads between us and the divine in Baptism and Holy Communion, but are there other are “sacramentum moments” for you?

-Some of my best childhood memories are from our family cabin in northern minnesota built on the shores of (believe it or not) Woman Lake. My grandma and grandpa built this cabin in 1980 together. My grandpa died in 1992 which forced my grandma to have to make decisions at the time of downsizing. She moved out of their longtime home in Edina, MN and cleaned out many things, but never was tempted to sell the cabin. Growing up with mostly only my grandma (who is still living), I always remember her and her “dock time”. I would sit with her for hours on the bench bolted to the dock looking over the lake. Maybe it was in conversation, or watching a storm come across the lake, or watching big waves crash into the shore. She was pretty faithful to our church in Minneapolis, but during stressful times sometimes she would say: “I got to go sit on my dock.” Sometimes she needed that crossroads with the divine instead.

-As we think about our own personal crossroads with God, let us finally not forget as people of faith, our calling in creating *sacramentum* for others. How cool is that as Christians to be called to do this! Could this water well be a crossroads between a community and God?

-All of the wells that ELCA World Hunger helps to build in Cambodia are mostly agricultural wells, wells that help to water and give life to crops. Most farmers in Cambodia have 2 acres of land or less. 75% of Cambodia’s crops have been devoted to rice, but the government has been pushing for a greater diversity of farming for food security reasons. Thus, many of these small farmers are in the midst of changing their crops to something else, a real crossroads and risk for themselves and their communities. So, a water well for many of these communities is the lifeline that helps them show up in this multi-layered crossroad. This, in my opinion, isn’t just a governmental “economic changeover of crops”, but it is also a *sacramentum* movement for us. We get to help this community show up at a “crossroads of life.”

-May you, this week, be blessed with *sacramentum* moments. May you be able to witness being at a “crossroads of life” to others in love. Amen.