

## Once Upon a Puddle

"Then Jesus looked at him with love and told him, 'There is only one thing more you must do. Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor; you will then have riches in heaven. After that, come and follow me.'"

Mark 10:21

It is Ash Wednesday, and as the minister steps from behind his large wooden pulpit, the congregation expects another typical Lenten sermon, exhorting them to turn back to God. Instead, he walks quietly to the altar steps. The gentleness of his first spoken sentence sharply contrasts with the explosiveness of the next three exclamations:

This is a story about some fishes that live in a very small puddle of water.

"Give me that water bug!"

"No, I saw him first!"

"Get your fins off my supper! He's mine, I tell you!"

And so, every day, the little fishes would fight. In such cramped quarters, there isn't much else to do – except swim in circles and hunt for water bugs. Their stagnant puddle was cradled between the roots of an ancient oak, just beside a swiftly-flowing river. Life never seemed to change for the puddle-fishes.

But one morning, as they swam in circles and hunted for water bugs, there was a sudden noise:

SPLASH!

"Watch Yourself!"

"Stand clear!"

An amazing, brightly colored fish had jumped into the riverside puddle! The large fish and blue and red golden scales. And-what was *most* unusual for this particular puddle of water-he was smiling.

At first, the frightened puddle-fishes huddled together against the puddle's far edge. Finally, one of them asked:

"Where do you come from?"

The Sparkling Fish smiled brightly:

"I come from the sea!"

"The sea? What is the sea?"

The Sparkling Fish shook his head in surprise:

"No one has ever told you about the sea? Why, the sea...the sea is what fish are made for!" he rubbed a golden fin against his nose, puzzled:

"How can I explain the sea to you? Well... it isn't like this little puddle; it's endless! A fish needn't swim in circles all day, for he can dance with the tides. Life isn't lived in the shade-the sun arches over the waves in silver and crimsons! And there are many splendid sea-creatures, such as can hardly be imagined.

"It's endless! And sparkling clear. The sea is what fish are made for!"

A water bug skirted the surface overhead, but no one moved. Then a pale gray puddle-fish spoke up:

"How do we get to the sea?"

The Sparkling Fish pointed toward the large black root that lay close to the river's edge"

"It's a simple matter. You jump from this little puddle into that river and trust that the current will take you to the sea."

Astonishment clouded the puddle-water. At long last, a brave little fish swam forward with a hard-experienced look in his eye. He was a Realist Fish.

The Realist Fish looked down at the muddy puddle-bottom and frowned:

"It's pleasant to talk about this 'sea-business' but-if you ask me-we have to face reality. And what is reality? Obviously, swimming in circles and hunting for water bugs."

A look of distaste mingled with pity crossed his face:

"It's all pie-in-the-sea nonsense. Of course, I sympathize... you undoubtedly dreamed this up because of some trauma you suffered as little guppies. But life is hard. It takes a real Fish to face facts.

The Sparkling Fish smiled:

"But you don't understand. I've *been* there. I've seen the sea. It's far more wonderful..." Yet, before he could finish speaking, the Realist Fish swam away.

Next, there neared a fish with a nervous twitch in his tail. He was a Scared Fish. He began to stutter:

"If... I understand y-y-you, we're supposed to j-j-jump into that river over there?"

"Yes. For a fish who wants to go to the sea, the way lies through the river." The Sparkling fish swam closer. (It is difficult to understand someone when he stutters underwater.)

The Scared Fish's voice jumped to a screech:

"B-B-But... have you looked at that river over there? I'm just a small fish! That river is deep and strong and wide! Why, a small fish would be swept away by the current! If I jumped out of the puddle, I wouldn't have any control. NO! I just can't..."

The Sparkling Fish whispered:

"Just trust me. Trust that the river will take you someplace good..." But before he could finish, the Scared Fish hurried away."

Finally, there swam out a figure who seem very solemn and learned. (He had been in this particular school of fish longer than anyone else.) He was a Theologian Fish.

Calmly, he swam to the middle of the puddle and adjusted his spectacles. Setting down a small shellfish podium, the Theologian Fish pulled out a sheaf of notes from his vest pocket. Then he smiled at the puddle-fishes:

"My brother and sisters, our distinguished visitor has expressed many views which certainly merit consideration."

Then he bowed respectfully to the Sparkling Fish:

"However, my colorful friend, we must also concede that those fishes who so gracefully inhabit this humble puddle have expressed many views which merit consideration. By all means, let us be *reasonable*"

He glanced down at his notes, and then his smile brightened:

"We can work this out. Why not form a discussion group? We could meet every Tuesday at seven o' clock, and I'm certain that some of the puddle-fish would be happy to bring coffee and donuts...."

The eyes of the Sparkling Fish were sad:

"No, this will never do. Talking is important, but in the end-it is a simple matter. You jump. You jump out of this puddle and trust that the river will take you to the sea."

From somewhere above the muddied waters, a sparrow was singing. The light in the Sparkling Fish's eyes shone with a bright urgency:

"Besides, don't you know? Summer is coming!"

The puddle-fishes murmured:

"Summer is coming?"

"What difference does that make?"

The Sparkling Fish pointed toward the sun:

"Summer is coming. The spring rains filled this little puddle to overflowing. But this puddle is going to dry up someday. No puddle lasts forever."

The puddle-fishes were stunned, but then the Realist Fish swam out. There was a dark contempt on his face as he spat out his words:

"That's just like you religious people. When you don't honestly convince people of what you believe, you try to scare them. You're just one of those end-of-the-puddle fanatics!"

He swam away in disgust.

But then all the colors of the Sparkling Fish-blue, red, and gold – brightened into a warm glow. He whispered: "It is a simple matter. You jump from this little puddle, and trust that the river will take you to the sea. Who will come and follow me?"

At first no one moved, but then a few puddle-fishes swam to his side. Together they jumped into the river, and the current swept them away.

The remaining puddle-fish were quiet for a long time

Then once again

They began to swim in circles

And hunt for water bugs.

Self, Spirituality, and Scripture



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Block 3 Date \_\_\_\_\_

Journal Entry

Title: **Once Upon a Puddle**

Double page entry

JE # \_\_\_\_\_

Stamp date \_\_\_\_\_

**Written Reflection:**

On the right-hand page write a 100+ word response.

- With which fish in the story do you most identify? Explain your reason in three or four sentences.
- What was the message that the sparkling fish was trying to communicate to the puddle fish? What does this message mean for you? How does it connect to your life experiences?
- What does this story tell you about faith? (Reflect in light of one aspect we have discussed in class.)
- Have you ever had to take a “leap of faith” that was hard to undergo? Explain.

**Artistic Expression**

Artistically illustrate or some how represent a part of the story that you remember.