

**Thirsting for more**  
Menno Mennonite Church  
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**Purpose:** To connect our most elemental human need to our need to be shaped by God.

**Message:** As people of great desires, our desire for connection to God must be part of our deepest satisfaction.

**The Big Idea:** Our desire to be known is among our most basic of urges. We are invited to have this thirst quenched as we are known by the one who created us, known in God's son.

**Scriptures:** John 4:5-15, 25-29 (I will read), Exodus 17:1-7 (Please read)

**Synopsis:** Thirst, real thirst, makes all other scarcities pale in comparison. We can go for quite some time without food, sleep, and other necessities of life. But we know that having our thirst quenched is an utmost need which cannot be long ignored. When we thirst, really thirst, there is little else we can concentrate on, and we cannot long survive without our thirsts being quenched. Yet often we find ourselves denying or avoiding our spiritual thirst, being driven away into the categories of seeking, wondering and wishing that we might be filled. We are shaped by what we thirst after, what ever it is. We are called to fill our thirsts with the real sustenance of an encounter with God.

### **John 4:5-15**

<sup>5</sup> So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar,  
near the plot of ground that Jacob  
had given to his son Joseph.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus,  
tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well.  
It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water,  
and Jesus said to her,  
"Give me a drink."

<sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him,  
"How is it that you,  
a Jew,

ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"  
(Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her,  
"If you knew the gift of God,  
and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,'  
you would have asked him,  
and he would have given you living water."

<sup>11</sup> The woman said to him,  
"Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.  
Where do you get that living water?"

<sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob,  
who gave us the well,  
and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

<sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her,  
"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,

<sup>14</sup> but those who drink of the water that I will give them  
will never be thirsty.

The water that I will give  
will become in them a spring of water  
gushing up to eternal life."

<sup>15</sup> The woman said to him,

"Sir, give me this water,  
so that I may never be thirsty  
or have to keep coming here to draw water."

John 4:25-29

25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ).

"When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

<sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her,

"I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples came.

They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said,

"What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

<sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city.

She said to the people, <sup>29</sup>

"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

Thirst is an insidious thing. Its among our most basic requirements—air, water food, shelter—but it one of the on desires we are least likely to pay all that much attention to. If you are anything like me, you can be tooling along for quite some time before you realize that you are indeed thirsty. Living in the desert, we know a thing or two about thirst. We often think about it as the way it is depicted in cartoons—a dying, drying parching that becomes all-consuming until you open your canteen and pour out nothing but water. But at least in Arizona it was a whole lot easier than that. Going unaware of sweating given the rate of evaporation, by the time you realized that you were thirsty, you should have been drinking for a while already, and you are already dehydrated.

I am always fascinated by the way that Jesus takes the day-to-day interactions of meeting people at the watering hole and turns them into the stuff of learning and knowing something new. This woman comes to do what she needs to do—get water—another task for another day. But Jesus sees that the true thirst she carries is not, ultimately, for the life sustaining well, but the soul sustaining nourishment for someone who has seen much and lived, we find out, a complicated, all too real life. Her thirst is catching up to her, whether she has realized it or not. Both these stories tell us something about what it is to be thirsting when we are seeking to live in God's kingdom.

We are all thirsting for something. Our thirsts, our desires that long to be quenched hold a great deal of power over us, distracting us time and again to consider the need that we wish to satisfy. When I am truly thirsty, usually for a soda or something which is not the best thing for me in the first place, it is all that I can do to keep my mind in the present, and not on that which I desire. Thirst is no less imperative or directive when we find it within our souls. We may not be able to name it, we may not be able to even understand it, we may not be even able to realize that we have a spiritual thirst at all, but we often know on an intuitive level that we are thirsting after a quenching of a spiritual need, that a spiritual dryness has entered our lives. So much so that in the demands of daily life and living, and occasionally dry places in our lives, often by the time we are able to articulate our thirst—for God, for fulfillment, for nearness, for healing—what ever it is, our need has already become quite dire. But once we become aware of it, our thirst for the holy, for relief, can be our dominating distraction, blinding us to all else.

Yet, often we struggle to acknowledge that we are indeed thirsty for God. If we are with God, it is reasoned, and we are often told, we need never thirst again. Indeed, this very story and

Jesus' promise of eternal water within the soul is often used to explain why we shouldn't be thirsty. But we know that this is not true. The life of faith often contains periods of struggle, exhaustion, and longing. Often, even those who we look to as examples of the faith are the ones who have struggled in this way. Mother Teresa whose charity and love inspires many, and who is being fast tracked to sainthood wrote extensively and often about the thirst she felt for a sense of the holy. We see this time and again within spiritual writers, and I think on an instinctive level we know this to be true of ourselves. We do not always feel energized for the work of love. We are not always on fire with the passion of life and hope. Sometimes we know what it is to feel the desert around us, and our deepest selves running dry. Yet most of the time we keep it to ourselves because we have received the notion that this is somehow a failure of the spiritual plumbing within, that all we need do is find the right valve to restore the life-giving stream within.

Here is where I think that Jesus' use and adaptation of the ordinary things of his world to explain the big ideas of the life of the spirit and the calling of disciple leaves us in the dust. Or rather that we have left this in the dust. In our modern North American context, accustomed as we are to receive clean, healthy water in here-to-fore unheard of abundance with the mere twist of a tap, we find ourselves distanced to the assumptions that were at work here. For Jesus some 1900 years before the advent of indoor plumbing, and the woman seeking her daily water and so much more, water always took intention. Life revolved around water—where to get it, how to maintain it, and all the rest. Society organized itself around sources of water. A good well, one that could be counted on in quantity and quality, was something to be jealously guarded as prized property and handed down from generation to generation. People fought over wells. But there was always work, always practices, always intention to access even the best water. Day in; day out there was the walk, the drawing of the bucket and the long, careful progress back to use the water in daily life.

So it is with our spiritual wells. We must tend them. We must visit them. We must maintain our practices, drawing on our wells. This water of eternal life is there friends, it bubbles forth in places where, often, we least expect it and we most need it. It flows deep, steady, and coolly, and is always there if we but visit the well to draw from it. We have to draw from the well to drink from the well; and we must develop the practices in our lives that give us access to God's life-giving waters. For some of us it is a practice that has been long developed

over time and discipline that connects us with the divine. Sometimes it is a space or a place which has come to be a touchstone out of which the spring of life often flows. But whatever that practice is, we maintain it expecting to be met by God, trusting that we will be nourished by God's good waters that run deep.

This is a good practice at any time. Lent brings this task to the front of the queue. It brings it to the agenda. And now we have something new—a practice of social distancing as we engage a disease process that is new and working in many of us. In these days of altered schedules and diminished activity that is beyond our control, we might consider both the need to hew closely to that which quenches our thirst, steadies our nerves and increases our patience. But also we might note the opportunity in the disruption to do something different. Even if your life and schedule is not directly impacted, we will have more space-- there are no sports to attend, not games on TV. Church may be a more occasional experience at least as the form of the body gathered. I wonder—what are the wells you might turn to, the practices you might tend—and more than that—the practices you might share for quenching the thirst within. A good well was never a private commodity—it was a community asset in the ancient near east. How might it look for us to offer wells around which to gather, to sit, and to drink deeply for those who may find themselves thirsting? How are we going to offer each other spiritual water when we find ourselves in need? How are we going to work at things creatively to connect and support each other in the body of Christ?

May we each in these days find our sustaining wells, tend them, keep them, and be sustained by them, knowing that our waters run deep, and the eternal well of God's Spirit never will run dry. May it be so in these days and every day. Amen.