

We've all had encounters with storms and calm these past years – life changes, moves, parents and loved ones passing away, arguments and disagreements and being deeply wounded by the words of those who we thought were our friends. And then there was covid. Oh LORD! The pain that was revealed lying deep within all of us –was sometimes almost too much to bear.

Some of us have been tossed about and have wrestled with new ideas, new ways of looking at community, new ways of looking at scripture. Some of us have had to learn the new dance of sickness and pain. And some of us, when faced with the starkly barren and desolate places in our souls, have questioned and wondered at whether God is really with us and for us.

Last week we heard about Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus at night – about being born again – about being made new – about being birthed by God by water AND the wind of the Spirit. We talked about how God's Spirit blows us to all sorts of places – and we need to let go and follow where the current is taking us.

What a leap of faith! But how can we leap when the well has dried and the wind has stopped? What will catch us and hold us when water and wind are gone? We thirst for this water, and we crave for that wind of the spirit to ruffle our hair.

Today two stories – one for the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament speak to such a thirst and such a craving...and both texts ask an important question.

First, from the Old Testament...from Exodus 17.

The Hebrews had been travelling for a long time in the desert. Travelling anywhere in the desert is hard work – even by car. Thirst is a constant companion...being hot without something to drink we become first cranky, headachy, and nauseous and hot – always hot. With dehydration and heat stroke we stop sweating, we may become confused and eventually unconscious or dead.

The Hebrews had been walking in the desert for a long time. In the previous chapter, chapter 16, they faced the hardship of a lack of food and protested to Moses. Just as the LORD had heard the cry of the people suffering the oppression of slavery (Exodus 3:7), God now heard their cry of starvation and provided them with nourishment in the form of manna and quail.

While their lack of food had been sated, there was still no drinkable water and the people complained again.

**NRSV Exodus 17:1-7** From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as Yahweh commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

<sup>2</sup> The people quarreled with Moses, and said,  
"Give us water to drink." Moses said to them,  
"Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test Yahweh?"

<sup>3</sup> But the people thirsted there for water;  
and the people complained against Moses and said,  
"Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

<sup>4</sup> So Moses cried out to Yahweh,  
"What shall I do with this people?  
They are almost ready to stone me."

<sup>5</sup> Yahweh said to Moses,  
"Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you;  
take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go.

<sup>6</sup> I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb.  
Strike the rock, and water will come out of it,  
so that the people may drink."

Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

<sup>7</sup> He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested Yahweh, saying, "Is Yahweh among us or not?"

The Hebrews cry out to Moses: "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" (Exodus 17:3)

This is a very legitimate question. Even though the people had witnessed Yahweh's amazing display of power through the plagues, protection as they fled from the Egyptian army and provision of manna and quail, they still trembled and feared for their very lives in the face of death by dehydration.

Of course, they questioned Yahweh's presence with them – "have you led us here only to die of thirst? Would it not have been better to live in slavery in Egypt than to face death in the desert?"

And Moses too begins to doubt Yahweh's presence with him...and faced with the possibility of mutiny and death by crowd complaint, Moses too complained. Yet what was Yahweh's reaction?

In the place where there is nothing but rocks and boulders and dry hot dusty skin and mouths, Yahweh provides sweet fresh water.

The grumbling Hebrews are not condemned nor is Moses punished for his wariness. Instead, Yahweh simply instructs Moses to gather the elders, take them to a rock on Horab (or Mt. Sinai) and strike it with the staff used to part the Nile.

And the best part of all this, Moses is reassured of Yahweh's presence when, in verse 6, Yahweh says, "I WILL be standing there in front of you."

In a place where there was nothing but rocks and boulders and dry hot dusty skin and mouths, Moses struck the rock and enough water poured out of the rock to water all the people, and their animals... According to Exodus 12:37-38, about six hundred thousand men, not including women and children, a mixed crowd of neighbours and a great number of livestock.

Moses named the place Massah and Meribah – because here the Hebrews quarreled and tested Yahweh and asked, "Is Yahweh with us or not?"

Here, in their most desperate time of thirst and hopelessness Yahweh provided the Hebrews an opportunity for new life – all they had to do was drink. And, like so many times, Yahweh's grace and love and refreshment came in over abundance. There was enough fresh clean water gushing pouring out of the rock – enough to quench the thirst of millions.

Our Second Scripture is from John 4...a familiar story of Jesus doing, once again, one of his usual unpredictably glorious things. We catch up with Jesus on his journey to Galilee from Judea...He left Galilee because it was getting to politically hot for him. On the way to Galilee, Jesus and his disciples saved days of travel by cutting through Samaria. As you may know, or not, Jacob's well is one of these amazing wells that draws deeply – from somewhere – and has been full of water already long before Jesus ever walked into town – a well that had been there even before Jacob, the grandson of Abraham.

Anyway, one day, the disciples left Jesus to rest at Jacob's well and went into the city of Sychar to grab some lunch. As Jesus was resting by the well and as he sat there, he noticed a woman coming up to draw water. And he asked her for a drink.

NRSV John 4:9-29:

<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."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." <sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

<sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

<sup>25</sup> 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 jars 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?"

Living water is a name often given to something that's rare in the desert. Living water is what you would call a stream that is moving, or the source of that stream that pours richly and abundantly. Living water is a stream in the desert, a new thing springing up to give life where all was dry and empty of life...Living water poured out of that rock in the desert and now Jesus offers living water to this woman.

He knows who she is, and he invites her to the new thing that God is doing. He says of the old well, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (13-14)

Jesus wants this woman to come away from what has become stagnant and lifeless and life-draining, and to witness what God has done and will do beyond her wildest imaginings. Jesus invites her to be carried along in the moving stream of God's Spirit and truth; to receive life from the truest source that doesn't stop moving and flows even in the driest and most improbable places.

This living water is even for this woman. She, who is likely looked down upon by the other women in her community, possibly taken advantage of by the men, and whose faith is disdained by her neighbours...she wonders where God is, even while she knows that the Messiah is coming, and has just learned that he already has and is with her right now! In both our stories today, Yahweh, the God who was, is and will be – was questioned – nay, even doubted by those who were lost and dehydrated – both physically and spiritually...looking for water in the middle of a dry and desolate place. "Is God really here?" and "Can God really help me?"

And we today... Whether we like it or not, we have all come to know the desert – and I don't mean Eastern Washington. We have come to realize that we have deep thirst. It's in our yearnings – to be maskless – to be free of pandemic constraints, to once again worship and welcome without fear of the stranger and what the stranger may bring. We long for a time when the spirit will again move through us to motivate us to action – or to deeply resonate in our souls. We long to feel the cool wind signaling the coming rain. And we are all thirsty.

Today, during the season of Lent, we are reminded – with the help of Moses, the Hebrews and the Samaritan woman, that what we are looking for – yearning for – thirsting for – is God. Will God help us, or not? Is God here or not? The wilderness is a terrible place to thirst, but it's a wonderful place to find God's living water. Thanks be to God.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Joyner, R. A. (1996, September 29). *Is God Here or Not?: Day 1*. Is God Here Or Not? . Retrieved March 6, 2023, from [https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf20025b8/is\\_god\\_here\\_or\\_not](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf20025b8/is_god_here_or_not)  
Taimataora, A. (2020, September 27). *The Essentials God Provides: Exodus 17:1-7*. Readings & sermons . Retrieved March 11, 2023, from [http://www.plainspresbyterian.co.nz/?page\\_id=86#:~:text=God%20cares%20deeply%20for%20each,form%20as%20we%20would%20like](http://www.plainspresbyterian.co.nz/?page_id=86#:~:text=God%20cares%20deeply%20for%20each,form%20as%20we%20would%20like).