

Exodus 17:1-7

John 4:5-42

Give Me Water

Water. It is a source of life. Without it we cannot survive. It is said that on average a person can only survive for three days without water. Of course, there are many variables that can affect that, but the fact remains, we need water for life.¹ So it comes as no surprise that water is used throughout the scriptures to demonstrate the physical need of water, such as the story of the people in the first testament who complained to Moses. Actually, almost revolted over the lack of water. And we hear also the story of the woman from Samaria who came to draw water at the well of Jacob only to find Jesus him spouting words that he can provide living water that quenches thirst.

Water cleanses, that we know. So, it is a symbol for that which cleanses us from sin. Sin being anything that separates us from a Holy God. Water also refreshes. It sustains the life of people, plants, and animals...the whole of creation. As such, there has been much controversy over corporations buying well water to bottle it and make money. Many, including the Presbyterian Church in Canada see water as a right and not a privilege. Bottled water makes it seem that to have water is not our right, that somehow it is a commodity. There is a time and place for bottled water, but profiting on what is considered essential to human existence should be challenged. The fact that there are many First Nations in Canada without access to clean drinking water is a huge downfall in our caring for one another. None of us in towns and cities across Canada would ever put up with such a crisis for long. We would cry out for justice, for things to be put right, just as the Israelites did so long ago.

Water is essential, life-giving, life-sustaining, and valuable. Water or lack there of changes everything.

Let's walk for a moment with the Israelites in the wilderness. Remember they have seen God do mighty and awesome things to set them free from slavery in Egypt, but when they lacked water, they forgot how God had been with them and provided for their every need. Not their wants, but their needs.

As we read, ³ But the people were thirsty for water there. They complained to Moses, "Why did you take us from Egypt and drag us out here with our children and animals to die of thirst?" ⁴ Moses cried out in prayer to God, "What can I do with these people? Any minute now they'll kill me!"

¹ [How long can you live without water? Facts and effects \(medicalnewstoday.com\)](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/322822) Accessed March 10, 2023.

This was a crisis moment. Complaining from the people to Moses and then Moses complaining to God. More than complaining, this was serious, dangerous, life threatening. "Give us water" is their demand. They demand it from Moses, but even more so they demand it from God. The people had forgotten that God was capable and willing to provide...to be God with them.

As the story goes, God instructs Moses to strike his staff against a particular rock and water gushes out. The people are good again, for a while anyway. They will find new things to be frustrated about in the stories to come, but for now they are appeased.

It is of note that Moses named the place "Massah (Testing-Place) and Meribah (Quarreling) because of the quarreling of the Israelites and because of their testing of God when they said, "Is God here with us, or not?"

Water also comes into play in the story of the woman from Samaria and her encounter with Jesus at the well. Now, often the part of this story that gets attention is the fact that this woman has had so many husbands. People like to read into that part about the husbands. She and her behaviour are judged. The men who have put her in this position are not judged. Many a sermon has made her out to be a sinful woman.

But Jesus doesn't go there. We are never told why the woman has had so many husbands. What we do know is that in the culture of that time, women were the possessions of men, not seen as valuable in and of themselves. As well, there were restrictions about men speaking with women, particularly in public. We also know that the woman had come to the well at noon time, which was the least likely time for others to be there. She was likely avoiding people who would judge her.

When Jesus asks her to give him water, a whole lot of boundaries were being crossed. Social boundaries, religious boundaries, ethnic and gender boundaries were all set aside so that Jesus could meet this woman where she was at, physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. All of this pointing back to the words of John 3:16...for God so loved the world.

You see most Jews would do whatever it took to avoid going through Samaria, and Jesus really didn't need to go there to get from the Judean countryside back to Galilee. He could have done what others did – take a different route. But Jesus didn't. He went to Samaria and encountered a woman at a well and in a conversation changed her whole life.

She came to the well with a water pot to fill and when Jesus offers her a well spring of water that would alleviate her thirst for a life time she said, "Give me that water". After their candid and deeply theological conversation, the woman, who has come for water with her water pot, completely forgets about the water and leave the pot behind. She went back to her village and told people, "Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out." She wondered aloud, "Do you think this

could be the Messiah?" And that sent people back to the well to check it out for themselves."

She was curious, she was changed by the encounter. Remember she came to the well when she believed no one else would be there and ends up going back to her village and speaking with people, offering them food for thought, a hope for the Messiah. A Messiah that people whose understanding was that the Messiah would bring new life to people, even if they didn't truly understand how.

The disciples were shocked when then had come upon Jesus speaking with the woman. They didn't challenge him, but they judged him and likely the woman for the encounter. We are told that one could see it on their faces.

Jesus then goes from talking about water with the woman to a conversation with the disciples about food and harvest time. Jesus is attempting to get everyone to know that there is refreshing water and nourishing food to be had in one's relationship with God. Jesus is not saying that we don't physically need water and food. Of course we do. But it is because food and water are so important to human survival that Jesus uses those elements to speak to the life-giving relationship that God offers each and every one of us.

This passage is so rich in the ways it speaks about our relationship with God and others, that I can't touch on all of them, so I want to pose a few thoughts.

First, what boundaries are we being asked to cross that would bring God's love into the world and especially to those we think are least deserving of God's love? And then how comfortable are we with watching them share that life-giving message to others in the community, even when they are new to their understanding what it means to be a person of faith?

Another question that could be asked is, what do we need to leave behind? Like the water pot that the woman left, what are we being asked to leave behind in order to bring the love of God into the world. It may be something of ourselves that we are asked to leave behind. It may be something about our worship or the way we do ministry. It may be our judgements, our expectations, our comforts.

And what about the water itself...this life-giving water that Jesus offers? Do we drink from the well that brings us life and life to others or do we continue to be thirsty, never satisfied, always longing for something that will sustain us? Are we willing to take the chance on the change that will happen in us when we drink from the life giving well of water.

Jesus said, "...Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life." Think about that in your own life. "an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life." That sounds like something to take hold of.

We get to offer that water to others. We have the privilege of sharing God's love with those we would least likely chose to spend time with, and also with those we love dearly. We get to experience that life-giving water for ourselves. Give me water...Lord give us the water of life...a sustaining relationship with God that flows in and through us and out into the world.

In Christ, with Christ and through Christ. Amen.