

Every time I go to the beach, I watch the waves for hours. There is something majestic and powerful about this part of God’s creation. It doesn’t get old because somehow every wave is different and uniquely beautiful. As part of God’s creation, we are drawn to God’s creation, especially during this season I hope that God’s creation has brought you deep peace and gratitude.

After not being together in person for nine weeks it is appropriate that we are talking about God’s saving action of water in our lives today. We have been thirsty to experience church together, our souls have been parched with the solitude of the pandemic. So today we come together to hear once again of God’s gift of living water in our lives.

In our Old Testament Scripture from Exodus, we meet the Israelites in the wilderness. We have also been wandering in the wilderness with Christ this season of Lent. On the second week of Lent we wandered through the fire, following the light of God, as he walked closer to the cross. Today we wander through the water and remember who and whose we are.

At this point on our Lenten journey, we may begin to be feeling the fatigue of wandering behind Jesus. We may want to take a break or have a little nap, but Jesus continues to invite us to follow him to the cross.

This pandemic had made us exhausted. Our souls are weary from all those who have died of COVID, we are tired of not being able to do every day normal things that we once took for granted.

This past week I spent some time at Roslyn Retreat Center for the Board interviews, and I went inside their beautiful chapel. I wept as I looked at the grandiosity of the place that had been stripped down to the bone, making it safe for people to be in. This is how I have felt as I have spent time in our empty churches awaiting the time we could be together again.

We are grieving, and we must name that. But even during our grief, our Scripture for today reminds us that God continues to offer us living water.

We meet the Israelites today after they have crossed the Red Sea to safety. They are free, but this freedom has not come without it challenges. Out in the wilderness they find that they do not have even the most basic of necessities including water. We know that the body can go without food for several day, but water is necessary for life.

The Israelites complained to Moses. They asked: “Did you not have a plan? Now what are we supposed to do without water?” Just as Abram asked God for a sign, here the Israelites demand God to show up. God responds by allowing water to spring forth from a rock. Moses uses his staff “which embodies his authority from God” to hit the rock and the Israelites are given life.¹

All throughout the Old Testament we see how God’s saved God’s people through water. God saved Moses through water that directed him to the reeds when he was a baby. God saved Noah and his family from the flood, God parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could get to safety and God made water spring forth from rocks so that the Israelites could be sustained as they continued their journey to the Promised Land.

We see that God’s saving action of water permeates the New Testament through the water of the womb in which Jesus was carried and today through our Gospel lesson about the Samaritan woman at the well.

During this season of Lent it is important for us to remember that God already knows us. In Psalm 139:9-10 we hear that there is no where we can go to hide from God: “If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

So, if God already knows us on our best or worst days when what are we waiting for? Lent is a time for us to confront our own sins and repent, this is also the opportunity to fully surrender to God.

In this interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman we see how Jesus embodies God’s ability to know us intimately. To the woman, Jesus was a stranger, but to Jesus, the woman would become a witness of the gospel.

Commentary tells us that this conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is “one of the longest dialogues in the Gospel.”² This shows us that Jesus has a lot to teach us about God through this encounter. Time and time again we see that Jesus seeks out the lowly and the lost.

When Jesus approaches the Samaritan woman, he broke two societal norms at the time. First, Jewish men did not approach Samaritan women during that time.³ Second, Jews were to have no contact with Samaritans for fear of becoming ritually impure.⁴ And yet, Jesus engaged this woman in conversation anyway.

Jesus also reaches out to us, even when we are unaware that we need Christ’s living water. On this day, the woman came to the well feeling like an outcast. Instead of being able to draw water in the coolness of the morning, her situation in life, made it so that she had to come to the well at the hottest time of the day. She had a checkered past and was probably surprised that this man was approaching her.

We also have a hard time understanding God’s prevenient grace which approaches us before we are even aware. The Samaritan woman didn’t realize it at the time, but her life was about to change. Through this beautiful exchange Jesus offers to the Samaritan woman “living water.”⁵

So, what is this living water? This is the same water that God offered to the Israelites when they were dehydrated as they wandered through the wilderness. It is the same water that saved Moses. It is the same water that was turned into wine at the first miracle of Jesus. It is the same waters that we experience through Baptism when we die to our sins and are raised to new life with Jesus Christ.

During this season of Lent, we are also searching for this living water. We strongly desire for Christ to nourish our parched souls. How can we accept this gift of living water in our lives today?

Our Scripture for today calls us to follow the example of the Samaritan woman. After she received the living water of Christ, she left her water jug behind. This image has always been so powerful to me. The empty water jug just sitting there, and the woman who had entered her new life. This woman who had earlier been avoiding people, went looking for them to tell them about the good news of Jesus Christ.

Like the Samaritan woman, sometimes we have a hard time letting go of our water jugs and allowing Christ and the Holy Spirit to fill us up. Time and time again God reminds us that we have also been saved, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today our focus is on a different cup.

As we come to the communion table today, we receive the body and blood of the Christ. The cup represents Christ’s blood poured out to save us. This is the living water through the cup that we receive today. With it, we ask that the Holy Spirit continues to blow through our lives and fill us up.

In what ways do you need to be filled today? Are you looking for forgiveness, or mercy or grace? Are you looking to let go of anger or hatred? During Lent we cast our sins upon the Lord because God can handle it.

As we continue to wander with Christ from the wilderness to the grave, with each step let us cast off the trappings of death in our lives and leave our water jugs of sin behind.

The good news for our lives today is that Christ continues to offer us the gift of living water each day, if we would only receive it.

How will you be open to Christ’s living water in your life today? How will you find sustenance in the blood of Christ through communion?

Today let us commit together to let go of something that has been weighing us down. Whether it is an obligation that we can let go of, or forgiveness that we need to offer, may we commit that when leave the service today we will feel a little lighter as we allow Jesus Christ to carry our burdens to the cross.

This week my cup has been filled by spending time with the Board of Ordained Ministry. We sat for many hours in prayer and discernment with the Holy Spirit as we interviewed candidates who feel called to ministry. This work is hard. This work is holy and through it I am blessed.

But I think my biggest blessing this week is getting to be with all of you who I have missed so much over the past couple of weeks. God is still calling us to be the church beyond these walls, but there is something holy that happens when we can be together and see Christ at work within one another.

I hope today that your cup is also filled with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Endnotes

¹ New Interpreters Biblical Commentary. Vol. I. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2015. P. 387.

² Ibid. P. 480.

³ Ibid. P. 481.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John 4:11.