

“Are You Thirsty?”

Thirsty Prayers

(4 of 9 in the Lenten series, “Prayer”)

Luke 13: 1-9; Isaiah 55; Psalm 63

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February 28, 2016

From the Pulpit

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We continue with our Lenten Series on *Prayer*. Uncovering and discovering the ways in which prayer influences us, shapes us and challenges us. Tim was scheduled to preach this morning before he was called away on Tuesday to be with his family in the Philadelphia area. Our prayers surround them as they have this week, following the death of Tim's father, Herman. A few weeks ago he titled his sermon *Thirsty Prayers*. I will build off of that title today.

Prayer of Invocation: Ever present, ever nourishing God-silence in us any voice but your own. Open us to your word this morning by the power of your Holy Spirit. Refresh us, Restore us, Renew us. Amen.

Are you thirsty? These days, when we experience physical thirst, we are bombarded with options to quench it. Fruit juices, fruit drinks, energy drinks, sports drinks, coffee, tea, and soda. Carbonation, caffeine, alcohol and sugar conspire in any variety of combinations to reduce the net fluids of our bodies. Some of the most popular thirst quenchers may actually increase our thirst in the long run.

Then there is the ancient, basic, unglamorous but precious standby – water. Today we have a new take on water – this unglamorous liquid. Take a stroll down the grocery aisle and

see for yourselves the varieties of water. There is soda water and tonic water. Find water from mineral springs, artesian springs, mountain springs, imported from Fiji, imported from France, Poland or Maine. There is vegetable infused water, fruity water or some great new concoction of bubbly, fruity, and veggie-infused water. The combinations are endless.

Getting water to quench our thirst is easy for us. It's what's in our hallway fountains and break room coolers and in our basement mini-fridge. It's what's on tap! It's quick and easy and safe....until it's not. Take a village in Sub-Saharan Africa, when the open water source, the only watering hole in miles, is contaminated. Taking one sip would cause a water-borne illness and even death. Women (who take care of getting water in the majority of the world) walk even farther on a hot day for a bucket. They are thirsty for good health.

Then take Flint, Michigan, when the water coming out of American house pipes is toxic---even deadly. Our brothers and sisters are thirsty for more than water—they are thirsty for justice.

Quenching thirst-----it can be challenging to nearly impossible. What are you thirsty for? Acceptance, recognition, reconciliation, affection, love?

People throughout history thirst. It's not just the physical thirst that makes us long for something more, it is a spiritual thirst that makes us work on a deeper connection to the Holy; a stronger connection to God.

Prayer is a powerful connector to God. **We pray when don't** know where to turn. We pray when the worry is so great, or when the circumstances require more than human intervention. We offer prayer hoping beyond hope for an answer. But sometimes the defining moments of our lives are shaped more by the times when, in spite of all our prayers, God says nothing at all.

Sometimes in spite of praying hard, or praying well, or praying often, nothing happens. **We didn't wrestle with God for understanding; we didn't struggle to accept God's better plan** for our lives. We simply talked to God (maybe we pleaded, or yelled at the ceiling shaking our fist, whimpered through the night shedding tears out of our great pain). Yet there is nothing. We are left standing in the parched cracks in the earth. There are times of drought when we feel as parched in our being as the lawn that crackles beneath our feet on a hot August afternoon.
Parched. Thirsty.

In his book, *Sacred Thirst*, pastor and president of Princeton Seminary, M. Craig Barnes writes, “both the Old Testament and the New Testaments describe the desert as the place the difficult, speechless pilgrimage toward God begins. All patriarchs of the Bible,” he says, “found themselves, even Jesus, in the desert in order to find God.”

Barnes goes on, “No one in ancient society wanted to go to the desert. It was parched, desolate place where people were convinced they would die. If they had to pass through a desert, they did it as quickly as possible because it wouldn’t be long before they would run out of resources.

But the worst part of the desert was always the deafening silence. Human words don’t last long out there, and divine words are as hard to find as a drop of water in the endless expanse of heat and sand.”

When God finally did speak, God’s words appeared as a stream of water to a people whose souls has become as parched and silent as the dried-up desert in which they lived. When they attended to God’s words and stayed by the stream in the desert, like deer who long for flowing streams (Ps44) they found refreshment for their souls.

When we believe our prayer life has dried up, there is only one thing to do: pray about it. There is simply no alternative but to remain in the desert places when we are led there, including waiting out the long dry spells when we are doing nothing but wandering around in the wilderness of our own prayers. There is no easy way out.

It always feels as though we are wasting time in the wilderness, that we are heading nowhere and will never be able to leave. At no time is this more true than when we have entered a desert in our prayer life. But God brought us into this place for a reason--the same reason we are always led into the wilderness: **to learn that our thirst is for a God we do not control.**¹

One day at noon a woman, traveled to Jacob's well, and let the bucket plunge in. She faced the ridicule of the community; she was shunned from others because of her life. She is thirsty. She is met by a man at the well who came because he is hungry and thirsty. The man offers her words of acceptance to fill her and reassure her. The man offers her words reminding her she is embraced by God.

¹ M. Craig Barnes, Sacred Thirst: Meeting God in the Desert of our Longings. With gratitude for his chapter, *When Prayer Dries Up*.

It's Jesus-and the woman is a Samaritan. Instead of getting up and leaving, Jesus stays and opens up a conversation with her. Jesus looks at her and sees a human being God loves, a person with gifts and skills to offer. The man at the well talks about living water, about those who drink from it will never thirst again.

She doesn't yet know how thirsty she is for God. She finds herself drawn in as if Jesus' words are a well of water themselves. With this stranger she takes heart. She feels hope, as if this living water was already bubbling up inside.

Thirst is a gift that gets us to the water. It gets us moving to the edges of the stream flowing through the driest ground. Thirst signals that something is not the way it is supposed to be and not the way things are to remain. Thirst is what can point us to the life-giving, life-saving places that quench the driest soul with the presence of God.

Often, we do not realize how parched our soul really is. We can become so involved in the minutia of daily living that we don't realize how thirsty our soul really is -- until the Spirit grabs hold of us in some surprising way and offers the

cleansing, cooling, renewing draft of the holy water of God's presence.²

It's Jesus who offers to the woman at the well living water. They talk about finding life in the dead places. Water that quenches the driest mouth, the thirstiest souls. Living water is the spring gushing up to eternal life. If you are thirsty, even the least bit, Jesus invites you, welcomes you, yearns for you to come to the waters and drink up God's presence. This is what Jesus promises to those who thirst for his presence. Living water still holds the gift of life for us all.

On another day, about noon, Jesus will speak of his thirst again. This time he will face death. On that day, only vinegar will be offered, in mockery. The gift of his living water will not be apparent to the one holding the sour sponge.

Author Frederick Buechner says,

...by [Jesus'] dying he released into the world an entirely new kind of life, his kind of life, that has flowed down through the tragic centuries like water through a dry land, making alive and whole all who will only kneel to drink. (Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*, p. 110).

² Rev. Peter Wallace, www.Day1.org

Today, we witness the power of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism and we celebrate the life-giving nature of the sacrament. In Baptism, as we experienced just moments ago, **Graeme was marked as Christ's own, and welcomed into the living, breathing, life-changing experience of the community of faith.**

We, too, remember, in those waters, there is renewed life for us. We are no longer parched. We are not thirsty any more. Instead, our thirst is quenched with living water. We are claimed. We are forgiven. We are loved. We will never be thirsty again because of the living water offered to us. In the waters of baptism we are replenished, we are renewed, we find **a place where the source of water in our lives...is never dry.** It's a place where the well is never dry.

Are you still thirsty?

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