

*“Give Me A Drink:
Spiritual Thirst for Living Waters”*

*Lent 3
John 4:5-42*

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From the Pulpit

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These three words came to me time and time again when meditating on this scripture. Are you thirsty?

Thirst is something that we experience daily, unless you are freakishly well hydrated.

Thirst is something that we seek to alleviate in countries where there isn't access to fresh water.

Thirst is something that we think of when you can't eat or drink anything before or after a surgery.

Thirst is what we feel running off the football field in the summer, leaving spin class, or coming inside from a hot day on the beach.

Thirst is something we know and understand on a biological and instinctual level.

If we pause for a moment and think about what it's like to be thirsty, really thirsty. What comes to mind? Dry lips? Dry mouth? A yearning in the back of the throat? Discomfort?

If you're really dehydrated you may start to get a headache, body ache, and feel fatigued.

There are also times when dehydration can manifest as hunger. So maybe as we imagine being thirsty we hear our stomachs rumble, and we feel emptiness.

But our physical thirst is just one way to think about being thirsty.

The other day a kid said to me that he didn't like a girl in his class because she was "thirsty". In this context, the word has been re-appropriated by youth to say that someone is acting "desperate for attention" or "too eager".

And thirst can indeed be a way to describe a sense of lack or need. Maybe that need is for something spiritual or emotional.

Our bodies and spirits are intuitive. We have senses and feelings that alert us to pay attention to different things. Thirst is one of those senses. An uncomfortable feeling, a response from your body or your inner being that something is missing, that something is lacking, that something needs to be done for your survival.

And so Beloved ones, I ask you today, are you thirsty?

On the day-to-day grind, asked to give time, asked to do more with less.

Are you thirsty?

Like a woman standing at the side of her dying mother feeling that God hasn't answered her prayer.

Are you thirsty?

Are you parched like the spirits of black youth, desperate for their brown bodies to be acknowledged as worthy of love and respect?

Oh Beloved, are you thirsty?

Are you thirsty like the girls and women who encounter day in and day out the thousand little cuts at school, work, and at home that they aren't enough, in a world that proclaims equality but lives misogyny.

Are you thirsty?

Like those without a home, without a clean shirt to cover them, treated as less than human?

Are you thirsty? Like a wife watching the father of her new born child get sent to federal prison and deported, unsure if he will get a chance to see his little girl grow up?

Or thirsty like a foreign woman, walking to the well at noontime carrying her life's burdens and her clay jar, the sun burning into her back?

Are. You. Thirsty?

As you ponder this feeling and awareness of thirst I want to go over three lessons for us as Disciples of Christ.

The first lesson is that Jesus uses thirst as a way to connect outside of himself and his community. We are called to do the same.

We have moved this Lenten season from last week's scripture in John chapter three where Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the

middle of the night; a Pharisee, a male member of the Jewish religious establishment, who is trying to make sense of Jesus' signs and demonstrations, to John chapter four, where Jesus starts a scandalous conversation with a Samaritan woman, an unnamed woman from an enemy people, in the middle of the hot dusty day. It's a striking contrast. Literally night and day.

Jesus not only strikes up a conversation with this woman, but he asks to drink from her vessel. He asks for a drink of water in the noonday sun, the brightest part of the day, far beyond being hidden and far past being discrete. The woman notes this scandal immediately and openly in verse nine. "How is it that you a Jew, ask a drink of me, A Woman of Samaria?"

Jesus is breaking some serious social and cultural norms. Culturally, many suppose that Rabbi's at the time were not supposed to talk with women out in public. At the very least we know that the disciples marveled and were amazed that Jesus spoke with this woman, though they dared not question him.

Also, the Jews and the people of Samaria have had a long-standing conflict concerning where to worship. I'm talking a conflict that includes competing temples, bitter fights, and theological dissention.

Regardless of all that, Jesus says I'm thirsty. And asks for a drink.

Note that Jesus leads with his own vulnerability to strike up the conversation with this woman. This dynamic that Jesus uses, (asking for water to drink) puts the woman in a powerful position, she has the power to say yes or no. And his words simultaneously communicate that he trusts her with his very human problem.

This moment in the scripture conversation sparked a memory I have of a seminar I attended some time ago.

In the seminar one of the bullet points was that individuals were considered more likeable and were more readily trusted by people if they weren't afraid to ask favors or for help.

Isn't that something? These days I feel like our instincts are always to offer to help someone, not ask them for help. I've literally had sick patients in the hospital tell me that they felt guilty asking the nurses for anything.

As giving compassionate people how many times have any of you said to someone in crisis, "Let me know if you need anything?"

As a people who live in a culture of independence how many times have you forgone asking your neighbor, your friend, your sister, your spouse, anyone, for help? Your pride undoubtedly in the way.

Now we must pause. As Christians, Jesus gives us a different kind of model to follow for our lives. In our everyday activities, in the fight for justice, in the global community, we must lead with our vulnerability; we must lead with our pain instead of our might. Lead with openness instead of our ability to do or fix.

Vulnerability is about being open, is about being authentic and open minded, as well as humbled. It means we start any conversation with a tender heart. Regardless of political party or religious background.

Jesus understands this and so he begins ministering to this woman by asking for help, before offering the blessing of the Spirit. This brings us to the second lesson: Jesus offers living water to all, without judgment. Our calling as Christians is to further that ministry.

Jesus offers himself to the woman after her initial response. He tells her that if she knew the gift of God and who he was that she would be asking *him* for a drink.

Not only does he say this engaging her attention further, but also he reveals his knowledge about her, giving her a mini demonstration of his wisdom and power. Jesus inquires about her husband and the unnamed woman says that she has no husband. He agrees pointing out that she has had five husbands.

There could be many reasons for the many husbands, she could be widowed, forced to marry again and again. Women at this time had little power or agency if they were on their own. Jesus knew this, which is why we see the care of widows and orphans often mentioned in the Gospel.

Many interpretations of this scripture say that Jesus is judging her morals with having had so many husbands, but upon closer examination of the scripture Jesus merely reveals that he knows her past and the details of her life.

Jesus does not say that her receiving the living water is contingent on repentance for having these husbands or contingent on her being anything other than her truest self.

Meditate on this, Jesus offered the spring of life to a foreign enemy and to us, a nameless woman, with no contingencies and no call for her to change, just for her to merely ask for a drink. It is here that he shows here the exact nature of the expansiveness of his ministry.

Who are our nameless foreign enemies? How do we integrate this practice of offering boundless love, requiring that someone not change, requiring that they only ask? Well, we know that the scripture is pointing us to our calling of walking humbly and vulnerably toward scandalous situations and people outside of our comfort and community. Once we're there the spirit of God must speak through us in love and truth.

This brings me to the third and final lesson. That living water is of the spirit, true self in God, and love that takes us over. Jesus says that,

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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."

This imagery is beautiful. The Holy Spirit is like the coolest, cleanest, and most delicious water we've ever tasted. It strengthens our body and soul, it gives us a greatest burst of energy. And once we've tasted it, that burning in our throat never comes back. That is a lifetime of peace, a lifetime of contentedness, a lifetime of feeling whole and complete.

I think of the flowers that sat in my friend's windowsill. Pansies I think they were. When they were in desperate need of water they slumped over. Rather dramatically if you will. And when you gave them a drink of water, they stood up tall, their beauty, their color, a sight to behold.

Living water, the seed of the Gospel, which is love, the Holy Spirit, bubbles out of us and influences others because it cannot be contained. Much like the beauty of the flower. This kind of love is visible and influential. And we will never need a refill so long as we stay connected to God within us; so long as we continue to ask the Spirit to fill us each day.

This Lenten season and every season we stay connected through the stillness of prayer, study of scripture, through

action for justice, through following our path as disciples, witnessing to and loving all we encounter.

So, we need not worry about how we will speak from our vulnerability, or offer boundless love to all, so long as we allow the Spirit to move us. Letting go of all fears, of all pre-conceived notions, of all our burdens.

Last week, Anthony Brown spoke about where the wind blows. He spoke about the spirit moving wherever it wills. He spoke about us as disciples being able to see, being able to engage our imagination, our courage, and our bravery to follow where the wind of God lifts us.

In the reading for this week we learn that our thirst and recognizing the thirst of others can help us to do this. We hear the story of a woman who touched by God in a moment of thirst, leaves her clay jar at the well, swept by the spirit to witness to her community.

For, it is in the brightness of the noonday sun that we are so hot and so tired that we jump at the chance for something to quench us.

Beloved, it is the hot points in our lives, those things that push us to the limit. Whether it be relationship troubles, sexism experienced at work, a loved one dying, an injury, and so on.

It is these bright and hot places in our experiences where we have nowhere to hide and our feeling of need is so great that we cannot turn the spirit away when it is offered. We must accept it and ask for a drink.

Give me a drink, O God

Like the friend that sits with you at the hospital giving their time and their love. Or the neighbor who gives you a ride to work when your car won't start.

Give me a drink

Like the allies for the Black Lives Matter Movement crying out that the bodies and lives of Black and brown people are worthy of love.

Give me a drink

Like the ministry of Laundry Love to wash the clothes and bedding of families and individuals in poverty who just want to be treated like they're human.

Give me a drink

Like the women and men who marched in Washington DC, the spirit blowing and rising up their voices against sexism, misogyny and other idols.

Give me a drink

Like the woman at the well, thirsty in the midday sun, carrying
her worries and a heavy earthenware jar, offered the love of
Jesus Christ and a way of truth and spirit.

Beloved, Give me a drink.

Amen.

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