

12 March 2023—The Third Sunday of Lent: John 4:5-42

Jesus said, "...the water that I shall give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life..."

We see what happens to followers of Jesus: God's 'living water' flows into and out of our lives. In the ancient world 'living water' meant water moving, animated. Unmoving water is dead. The Dead Sea is so-called because the living Jordan flows in, but nothing flows out: the water stagnates and evaporates. For Christians, the image of living water points to four realities.

First, the water of judgment and salvation. In the Old Testament story of the Flood, water is the instrument of God's judgment on evil, and God's salvation of the Remnant (cf. I Peter 3:20). So, too, in the story of the Exodus. Pharaoh's army "...sank into the depths like a stone..." (BCP pg. 85) while the Israelites passed through the waters to new life. In the New Testament, John the Baptist announces judgment and salvation, water being the sign. In 1st Peter and 1st Corinthians, the Flood and the Exodus are forerunners of Christian Baptism. In Mark's and Luke's Gospels the Passion of Jesus is likened to baptism.

Jesus tells the woman at the well he brings living waters, in part, for judgment. The living waters will destroy the idols we worship in place of the one, true God. This is not judgment to run from, but judgment to embrace. Who wants useless idols when the beauty of God is at hand, a presence we can know and enjoy? The Living Water of Jesus brings true worship of our Saving God.

The 2nd water image is cleansing. In Judaism, ritual washing preceded worship (Leviticus 14, Exodus 30, 1st Kings 7). The prophets used the symbol of water-cleansing for the purging from spiritual defilement. The prophet Ezekiel received a vision: God showering the people with water flowing from the Temple (cf. Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah, and Psalms 51 and 46). At his Baptism, the Spirit is showered on Jesus, and on everyone baptized in the Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks of water-Spirit cleansing with Nicodemus. From Ephesians, Hebrews, and Titus we know Baptism brings the Holy Spirit's cleansing, regeneration, and renewal.

When we are cleansed truth is revealed. The woman admits she is five times married, and now cohabitating. This is her truth. Jesus' Truth is no matter the wreckage of our lives, he will cleanse us from sin, bring God's healing, strengthen us to live rightly, and make us springs of his living water for others.

The 3rd image is water quenching thirst. In Exodus 17 God provides water in the desert, gushing from a rock. The water-in-the-desert miracle is remembered throughout Scripture. Jeremiah proclaims God the object of spiritual thirst, and the living fountain to quench it (2:13). In the New Testament, the fountain of life is Christ, as in today's Gospel, Revelation Chapters 7 and 21, and I Corinthians 10. Jesus offers and is the living water to satisfy our deepest longings.

The 4th water image is fruitfulness. Jeremiah prophesied when God gathers Israel and makes a New Covenant with them, "*they shall be as a watered garden...*" (31:10-14). As we continue to live in, through and for Christ, God transforms faithfulness into fruitfulness. We become God's 'watered garden,' obvious, visible, unmistakable in the fruitfulness of the Church.

The woman tells others about Jesus, and faith is born in them. They believe in Jesus because of her testimony, and then through their own experience of Jesus, and the living water he gives.

Jesus will give living water freely to all. It is ours for the asking. The irony is that Jesus thirsts for us before we thirst for him. Christ's deep love for us is as living water: rushing into us, breaking the stone hardness of our hearts, to shape us into God's likeness. Living water is Jesus Christ in us and with us. Jesus surging and thundering in us for our salvation and through us for the salvation of all. Listen to the almost last words of the Bible: *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let everyone who hears say, "Come!" And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift* (Revelation 22:17).

Christ's living water purifies, saves, forms, renews, washes, refreshes, quenches. And it never, ever stops. Living water drenches us. Living water is beautiful, joyful, reviving the souls of all who see, taste, and are touched by it. The living water who is Jesus, springs up to eternal life, wells up to flow out and change the lives of men and women, teenagers, boys and girls; coursing in, rushing out to change us, to change the world.

Holy Spirit, fill us with living water overflowing to heal, restore, cleanse, quench, and make fruitful your Church and all people to God's glory. Amen.