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“Living Water”
Exodus 17:1-7 John 4:1-30 Romans 5:1-11

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 17:1-7

In our passage from Exodus this morning the Children of Israel are in the middle of their wandering in the desert and about to perish from lack of water. Through Moses God produces water as a sign that God provides.

INTRODUCTION: I think most folks are familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. This morning we're going to read the story of the BAD Samaritan...and the Good Shepherd who came to seek and to save the lost, Hear the word of the Lord from the gospel of John, chapter 4:1-26

Let's pray. We thank you for this story of Jesus reaching out to someone that was considered too far gone. We thank you that you did not go to that conclusion with her ... or with us. As we meditate on this encounter this morning, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

LeBron James, the phenomenal basketball player, is now a spokesperson for Sprite. “The 60-second spot opens with James promising (while holding a bottle of Sprite and sitting at a table between baskets of lemons and limes): “I'd never tell you to drink Sprite, even if I was in a commercial for Sprite, which I am.” By deliberately *not* telling viewers to drink Sprite, LeBron — at least Sprite hopes — gets viewers to actually go out and drink Sprite. It's meta marketing at its finest. This is, of course despite the fact Sprite is by far the worst soft drink to consume when you're eating spicy food.” 1

What is good to drink when eating spicy food? Water. Human beings crave closeness to water. Maybe that's why most of the earth's population hugs the shorelines of its continents. Maybe it is because we are made almost entirely of water. Maybe it is because we started our life in water, living in it and breathing it for our first nine months of life. Maybe it is because almost none of us get the recommended daily 60-70 ounces of water we need to be optimally hydrated, so that whether we recognize it or not, our bodies are constantly thirsty.

Jesus and his disciples have been traveling for some distance and he is tired and thirsty. His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. Rather than go around Samaria, Jesus makes a point to going through it. He sits down by a well- known well--Jacob's well. When a Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water Jesus asks her for a drink.

There were not only strict rules about Jews and Samaritans not talking with one another, there were also rules about men and women not talking with one another. Because of this, the Samaritan woman is surprised, and somewhat rude. When she

somewhat curtly turns aside his request for water, Jesus turns a seemingly chance encounter into an opportunity for change.

For a Jew to have any close physical contact with a Samaritan, drinking water from a common bucket, eating a meal together, would make him ceremonially unclean. The daily prayer of a Pharisee would say, "I thank God that I am not a woman, Gentile or Samaritan," and would pray that the Samaritans not be included in the resurrection

Jesus says to this "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

She responds to his offer asking for some of what he has so she won't have to come to draw water in the heat of the day when no one else would come. When Jesus tells her to go get her husband and she says she is single, Jesus agrees and says that he knows that she's been cast aside 5 times by previous husbands and isn't married to the one she is with now. In those days, in that culture women had no say when it came to divorce. All a man had to do to divorce his wife was to say to his wife in the presence of some other men, "I divorce you. I divorce you. I divorce you." The fact that 5 men had divorced her must have meant that she had something going for her that after the first one divorced her 4 others would marry her.(It could also explain why the sixth was not yet committed.)

When Jesus gets too close to home she tries to change the subject to a religious discussion. "Sir," the woman says, "I can see that you are a prophet." And she tries to shift the discussion to a theological argument about where and how to worship.

Jesus was a prophet, all right, but he was different than any other prophet the woman at the well would ever encounter. He was breaking all the cultural taboos. When he clears up her misunderstanding about worship she counters with a mention of the Messiah who would come and how he would explain everything Jesus says, "I am he!"

This is one of the most dramatic moments in Biblical history. Jesus lets his true identity be known. He doesn't reveal his identity to the Sanhedrin or at the Temple to the priest. Jesus ushers in this glad news through this outcast among a people of outcasts. Who are the outcasts today?

This is startling even to this day--not what it says about Jesus, but what it says about us. How did we as a faith community miss the Gospel so completely? How did we become so judgmental toward others? How did we allow ourselves to shut out those of whom we disapprove, when time and time again Jesus did exactly the opposite?

Yesterday it was my privilege to officiate at the funeral of W. T. Jones. I learned something about him I didn't know. He served as a bombardier in World War II. On his 45th mission his plane was shot down and he had to parachute out and was caught in a tree. He was cut down and captured by the German army and incarcerated in a concentration camp. He managed to escape after 10 months and returned to the United States. When he got home to Baytown he told his mother, "I'm going to get a hot

shower, a good meal and then I'm going to find a wife and get married in 6 weeks. He went out that night, met Ina Mae and six weeks later they were married, a marriage that lasted 70 years. At his graveside he was surrounded by family, had a military salute complete with taps, and a full Masonic ritual. He was dearly loved.

In contrast I read about a very different funeral. A pastor in Brooklyn got a telephone call from the local funeral director who said that he had a funeral that nobody wanted to take. None of the ministers in the area wanted anything to do with this funeral. The man had died of AIDS. This pastor decided to answer the call to serve. .

He said that when he got to the funeral home there were about 30 men. They never looked up at him. Their heads were down and they stared at the floor the whole time he spoke. After the funeral service was over they got into the waiting automobiles and went out to the cemetery. He stood on one side of the grave with the undertaker and the men stood on the other side. They were frozen in place like statues as he read Scripture and prayed. They lowered the body into the grave and the pastor pronounced the benediction. He turned to leave and then he realized that none of them were moving. He turned back and asked, "Is there anything more I can do?"

One of the men said, "Yes. They always read the 23rd Psalm at these things and you didn't do that. Would you read the 23rd Psalm?" He said, "Certainly." And he did.

And then one of the men said, "Would you read to me and to all of us that passage that talks about the love of God, that nothing can separate us from the love of God?"

The pastor read, 'Neither height nor depth nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, neither life nor death, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

The pastor said nothing was more thrilling than to say to these men, who had been so ostracized and hurt by the church, that God still loved them and that nothing could separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (2)

God's grace and love is available to all--to the immoral and the amoral, to the Samaritan and the Jew, to the native and to the immigrant, to male and female, gay and straight, to red, brown and yellow black and white all are precious in his sight.

When Jesus' disciples returned from the town they were surprised to find Jesus talking with a woman. When they came she left...and she left the reason for which she came. She left her water jar. Drawing water from an earthly well was no longer a priority. The woman who shied away from people because she wanted to avoid their scorn was now energized to tell others, the very people who had hurt her that she had found the Messiah. This woman becomes a recipient of God's grace and becomes a vehicle of grace to guide others to the Master. Her whole town spent 2 days listening to Jesus and they too came to experience the same living water.

That's what Jesus offers us as well —life-giving, life-renewing, life-refreshing water that satisfies our longings in life, living water that nourishes our innermost selves, that comes from an active, living trust in God and a passionate faith in Christ.

We need this kind of water. We need this kind of trust in God. We need this kind of faith in Christ because without this living water, our lives are like a desert. We need to draw close to God, open our hearts, and allow the waters of God's love to flow within us and nurture that fragile planting of faith into fruit.

For far too many, the choice is to satisfy thirst by drinking from the sugary fountains of the world around us--trying to quench our thirst with the things around us. We try to fill ourselves with the drinks of power, possessions, and popularity. We think that personal pleasure can give us lasting satisfaction. We hope that power and prestige will fill us up.

But if power could produce peace of mind, then there ought to be a lot of contented people in Washington DC. If prestige could satisfy, then there ought to be a lot of satisfied people in Hollywood. If possessions could produce happiness, then our world ought to be filled with nothing but joyful people, because no one can dispute that we have more possessions than any generation ever before us.

But this world is not filled with satisfied, contented people. Because none of the "p" words — power, prestige, possessions, popularity, or personal pleasure — none of them can truly satisfy the thirst in our souls. Our thirst is for truth and meaning. Our search is for purpose in life that cannot be found in material possessions, carnal pleasure, or worldly power and prestige. Those streams do not contain living water. Those who drink from those streams will thirst again. Nothing short of living water that flows from a real, living relationship with God can satisfy.

Anne Lamott, in her book Traveling Mercies, describes a time when a fellow church member told about adopting her son through an organization called ASK, Adopt Special Kids. Part of the adoption process included filling out a questionnaire checking yes or no to one's willingness to adopt babies that had been born addicted, terminally ill, with physical "defects," or mental disabilities. She and her husband had checked every category down the list.

Lamott's pastor said that God, too, is like an adoptive parent who says, "Sure, I'll take the kids who are addicted, or terminal. I pick all the mentally challenged kids and of course the sadists. The selfish one, the liars . . . I choose them. I choose the disobedient ones and the terrified ones, the self-indulged ones and the trouble-makers, the damaged ones and the unlovable ones. In love, I choose them all. I will be a parent to them all. I will end their separation and bring them home to me." (3)

Inside the statue of Lady Liberty there is a sonnet written by Emma Lazarus. She wrote it to help raise money for the pedestal on which the statue rests. Her poem is titled, "New Colossus"

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
with conquering limbs astride from land to land;

here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
 a mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
 Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
 Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
 Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
 the air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
 "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
 with silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
 your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door! 4

The Woman in the harbor beckons all to come. The woman at the well beckoned those who had previously shunned her to come and come they did and they too received what we all need to receive which, unlike Sprite, can give us even more than the daily recommended 60-70 ounces of water we need to be optimally hydrated. The previously "Bad Samaritan" is a "Good Example" to us that anyone who is thirsty is invited and welcome to come and drink from the well that never shall run dry-the well of living water.

Let's pray. Dear Jesus. Thank you for seeking us out. Thank you for making a special trip to see to it that you had a divine encounter with this precious woman. Thank you for making a special trip to encounter each one of us. May we take to heart your example. May we give up on judging a book by its cover or a person by their past. May we see others through the eyes of the gospel, the evangel, the good news that no one is too far gone to be beyond your love and mercy and grace.

Lord, free us from our prejudices and our tendency to judge others without knowing them. Make us thankful for every follower of yours that you have sought out and rescued.

We pray for those in need: in need of someone to reach out to them, for those in need of healing, of support, of shelter, of food. We pray for the family of W.T. Jones Jr. in their time of grief. Hear us as we lift to you those people and concerns on our hearts this morning.

1. "Agency Spy" Erik Oster on Oct. 12, 2016
2. "30 Good Minutes", Chicago Sunday Evening Club, 2006
3. Traveling Mercies Lamott, Anne (New York: Anchor Books), pp. 254-255.
4. "The New Colossus" Emma Lazarus