

"Food and Water"

John 4:5-42

3rd Sunday of Lent, 24 February 2008

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

(note: this message is an expansion on the original thoughts of Larry Gillick, S. J., to whom I am deeply indebted.)

John 4:5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "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." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with

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her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Prayer.

Water.

It is a consistent theme through John.

Water is turned to wine early in Jesus' ministry.

A paralyzed man is healed by dipping himself into a pool.

The apostles are fishing by themselves out on the lake when a storm brews.

A man born blind washes the clay from his eyes in the pool, and he can see again.

And here today, Jesus meets a woman at the well.

What is it with Jesus, John, and water?

Water, bread, and light form consistent themes with John.

It is almost as if he wants to create the memorable, the common, a foundation for those new to the faith, and assurance for those experienced in the faith, from which to draw from.

Water is about deliverance;

a divining rod that points us back to the Hebrew slaves fleeing Pharaoh.

The divine initiative heard their cry and parted the sea to ensure their deliverance.

It also flooded judgment upon Israel's persecutors; the horse and chariot were drowned in the sea.

Water is about baptism; the initiation into community as well as the cleansing of past sins.

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Jacob's well could have just as well been a baptismal font, for, over it, there are liturgical gestures, rubrics, words of faith, and the call to express belief.

The dialogue flows like liturgy.

More than mere words, the sacred dance between Jesus and this woman has been repeated time and again throughout Christendom at the baptismal font.

Something good is about to happen.

It is high noon and a little drama has begun.

Jesus has no bucket. He is thirsty and there is a well. But there is no way to get water.

A pure-blooded Jew wouldn't use a communal bucket even if one was available.

Dietary laws prevented such reckless behavior.

And he was in a mixed-race land. Pure-blooded Jews just didn't mix with Samaritans.

This apparent impossibility is no different than "They have no wine."

It is no different than "Five loaves and two fish, but there are so many among us."

The invitation is subtle and indirect: Those who drink of my water, living water, never thirst again.

Jesus is the water.

He is the solution for her life-long thirst for something more, something meaningful, something profound.

Though a parade of successive husbands had failed to satisfy her, Jesus is the only living water that can quench the thirst of her soul.

Through him, sins are washed away.

Through him, one is connected to community.

Through him, living becomes eternal.

Living could have meant flowing; that is, less likely to be contaminated like stagnant swamp water.

This is the temporal request of a woman seeking to fill her buckets. She just needs it to be pure.

This is the temporal request we make when become so myopic that we fail to see beyond our own front door. Just give me a drink, Jesus, ice water, and keep it coming. I'm thirsty, and I want to quench my thirst.

But Jesus intends something more.

His intentional choice of words gave him the latitude to convey a deeper meaning.

Living meant life-giving.

He elaborates,

"Whoever believes in me, as scripture says, 'Rivers of living water will flow from within.'"

The Spirit flows from within.

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Living water is the life-giving presence of God given to all those who see and believe.

Living water is the Spirit of Jesus taking up residence in the heart of believers. This is what gives us life!

This is what gives us eternal life.

"Come and see" is this woman's plea when she returns to the village.

"Come and see" is the echo of a previous passage from John, back in an earlier chapter when Jesus invited his first followers.

"Come and see" is really the deeper, hidden agenda of John.

"Come and see" is really what first drew us to Jesus, if the truth be told.

When people come and see Jesus for who he is, true Living Water, that satisfies every thirst, our response is like a reflex: "This is truly the Savior of the world."

How poignant; especially during this season of Lent.

No other time during the Christian year is the need for a Savior so obvious.

When the world is apparently going to hell in a hand basket,

When chaos is swirling all around,

Jesus becomes the eye of the storm; the calm center that saves our life.

Jesus becomes Living Water; the only solution for our eternal search for something that satisfies our existential thirst.

We need a Savior; in spite of our brave front, false pride or inflated ego.

We need a Savior; to help us find out who we truly are, and where it is that we are supposed to go.

We need a Savior; to save us from this damnation brew of temptation and sin.

We need a Savior; to suffer and die, and three days later, rise again.

Like the un-named Samaritan woman at the well, we need a Savior; to give us Living Water, deliverance from sins and salvation into eternal life.

Amen.

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