

Broad Brook Congregational Church  
Third Sunday in Lent  
March 23, 2014

Exodus 17:1-7  
Psalm 95  
Romans 5: 1-11  
John 4: 1-42

### Living Water

Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink. (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner)

Does anyone else remember having to memorize that in high school English?  
It was the poem that immediately came to mind  
when I began thinking about the theme of thirst and the living water  
that runs through our Scripture lessons this morning.  
The immediate reaction to thirst is a physical one.

Thirst is what our brothers and sisters in Exodus are complaining about.  
The Israelites are walking through the desert  
and are finding few sources of life-giving water.  
They become quarrelsome  
and begin to take it out on Moses.  
Moses seems to be at his wits end with his flock.  
"What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me,"

Moses cries out to God.

Dehydration is a serious condition.

Those most in danger are infants, children, and older adults.

Symptoms of dehydration include:

extreme thirst, fussiness or sleepiness in infants and children.

Very dry mouth and skin,

rapid heartbeat,

rapid breathing,

irritability, and confusion in adults!

We can sympathize with the Israelites.

The Sinai dessert is not a friendly environment.

Even now travelers to that wilderness experience a sense of isolation.

With oppressive heat and the onset of thirst

one's mood would deteriorate quickly.

Dehydration is not fun.

The grumbling we hear could be grounded in irritability from lack of water.

They direct their complaints to Moses,

blaming him for the pickle they're in.

Lack of water causes confusion too—

Is this why they misdirect their frustration to Moses and not to God?

Even the joy of having been freed from slavery

could not subdue the effects of the Sinai wilderness.

Water was necessary for life.

Moses too seems to be suffering the effects of dehydration.

His irritability with his people is clear.

Moses throws up his hands and says "What am I going to do with these people?"

"Why blame me? "This wasn't my idea." "I'm just following orders."

In this text water symbolizes a life sustaining substance,

which all of us need.

Likewise, so is our life sustaining dependence on God.

Our text in Psalm 95 reflects back on the events at Massah and Meribah.

The psalmist is warning the people

that what hinders grace

is their stubbornness.

Although Romans 5: 1-11 makes no mention of water,

the overarching theme is God's redemptive grace,

just as it is in our other passages for today.

Paul explains that this grace

is made known

in the death and life of Jesus Christ.

Now, John 4: 1-42 contains rich fodder for sermons.

It is a well-crafted narrative

containing themes that run through out

this particular Gospel.

This morning we are going to focus

on the theological conversation

between the Samaritan woman and Jesus.

We are also going to take a look at

the comparison between Nicodemus, our seeker from last week

and the woman, this week's seeker.

First is the comparison between our two biblical conversationalists,

who are discussing important matters with Jesus.

Nicodemus is an insider,

a member of the ruling gender,

a Pharisee,

religious leader of the people.  
The woman is an outsider,  
a piece of property  
a no name Samaritan  
invisible to the Jews,  
one who society considers incapable  
of having a profound conversation about God.

Why is it important to point out the differences  
between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman?  
Well, it is important because it exposes boundaries;  
boundaries that are torn down by Jesus.  
He extends radical inclusivity.

Jesus knows everything about the woman  
And accepts and loves her anyway.  
He understands her to be a competent partner  
in this theological conversation.  
Her gender is immaterial as is her ethnicity and marital status.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night—in darkness.  
The Samaritan comes to the well at midday—in light.  
Nicodemus remains confused after his conversation with Jesus.  
It is not clear whether Nicodemus is converted.  
The woman becomes increasingly clear about who Jesus is  
And the gift he offers.

Second, is our conversation about God.  
What is the gift Jesus offers?  
Jesus is offering living water;  
life giving water.

Not the cold refreshing physical water from deep within the well;  
but, living water as metaphor.  
a metaphor for the gift of acceptance.  
The Samaritan woman is a nobody.

The profound Good News of this  
story is that Jesus does not turn away from her.  
In fact, he initiates the conversation.  
For those who have ever been ignored,  
Stigmatized  
Bullied,  
Abused,  
this story is a reason to celebrate.  
Jesus cares deeply for the nobodies of our society.  
It matters to Jesus  
what the marginalized have to say.  
Jesus knows their story and loves them anyway.  
We are called to do no less!

This conversation is Good News for all who seek forgiveness.  
Jesus does not judge.  
He knows the woman's story and loves her anyway!  
Jesus provides living water by means of acceptance and forgiveness.  
We are called to do the same!

This narrative is Good News for all believers.  
God's grace is made available through Jesus Christ.  
All we have to do is accept  
this amazing free gift.  
We are called to recognize  
the gift of God's grace in everyone!

God's gift is free for the accepting.  
We are called to recognize this gift in everyone!

The radical inclusiveness of Jesus' mission is a theme  
that bears repeating over and over again,  
especially in today's world.  
It is easy to build up walls.  
We, humans, seem to be very good at it, too.  
Tearing down walls is hard.

We stand condemned by this text  
if we do not do the hard work  
of breaking boundaries.  
We are called,  
as believers,  
to offer living water to all in need  
of God's inclusiveness.  
Let us then be vessels that pour out living waters as:  
forgiveness,  
acceptance,  
and, love;  
in order to tear down the walls, which separate us.  
God, grant us the courage and strength  
to do so.

This is the message I heard from our texts this week.  
I offer it in the Greatest of Hope.