

March 15, 2020 – Exodus 17:1-7 & John 4:5-30, 39-42

I once heard a story from a pastor in inner city Cleveland. His church was in a crime and poverty stricken area on the east side. And it had been broken into more times than the pastor could count.

One day he noticed that a padlock on a basement window had been removed with bolt-cutters. Now, this basement wasn't like ours. It was basically just a storage and utility room, sealed off from the rest of the church with its own set of locked doors. He looked around, saw that nothing was damaged or taken, and decided to simply replace the lock and ignore the whole incident.

But the next day, the exact same thing happened. The lock was cut, but nothing was taken. This piqued his curiosity. So that night he replaced the lock, and this time he stayed overnight at the church. Waiting to see if they broke in yet again. He waited for several hours.

And finally, in the wee hours of the morning, he heard noise in the basement. The lock was cut and the window opened. He debated whether to call the police right away, but decided he wanted to see what was going on first. So he crept across the basement, over to a corner that had a utility sink. And there he saw a woman. Surrounded by several jugs of water.

He approached her. She was scared at first. But he told her he was the pastor here and he promised not to call the police. And she said, "Pastor, I'm so sorry for ruining your locks but my water got turned off and I don't have the money to turn it back on. And I couldn't cook and couldn't give my kids a bath. And I just needed a little water."

It's easy to take for granted something as simple as a drink of water. It's one of the most abundant resources on the planet. 71% of the earth's surface is covered in water. It literally falls from the sky. And yet, if you don't have it, you can become pretty desperate.

We read about that in our Old Testament lesson. And at first glance, you may be tempted to say, "Ugh... it's the Israelites. Complaining. Again. Don't they ever stop complaining? Can't they be grateful for being freed from slavery for one minute?"

But then you have to realize, they were thirsty and they were in the middle of the desert. There isn't water for miles. And they're scared. Because you can't do anything without water.

And they actually have a bit of a point here. Slavery may be bad. But even a slave usually gets enough water to live. If Moses doesn't come up with a solution soon, people are going to start dying. And pretty soon, none of them will survive.

The same is true of the woman at the well. It is high noon. The hottest part of an obviously hot day. And this woman has traveled who knows how far out of the city to Jacob's Well just draw a bucket of water. And then lug it all the way back who knows how far to her home. It's an exhausting process.

Why does she do it? Because she has no choice. If she doesn't, she has no water. And it's clear that she doesn't like this process. When Jesus suggests that he can give her water so that she will never be thirsty again, she jumps at the idea, as impossible as it sounds. "*Sir, give me this water.*" I am sick of constantly having to walk back to this well. Day after day after day.

And so Jesus gives it to her. She doesn't realize it at the time. She probably thinks he's just making conversation. Go get your husband, he tells her. I don't have a husband, she says. You're right, you don't. You've had five husbands, and at the moment you're just shackled up with a guy.

You're thirsty. You keep going back to the well for water, but you only get thirsty again. You keep going back to your sin over and over. Trying to quench your thirst with broken marriages and false comfort and physical pleasure and immorality. You keep going back to the well, but it never helps.

It's interesting. In our Old Testament Lesson, it says that the Israelites were in "the wilderness of Sin." Now, it's called that because its wilderness around Mount Sinai. The word "sin," meaning "breaking God's Law," is actually an Old English word. It doesn't come from Hebrew at all. The similarity here is a complete coincidence.

But I think it's a really great coincidence. Because that what sin is. It's a wilderness that leaves us thirsty. That leaves us desperate for water. Desperate for more sin. Willing to do anything to get it. Willing to walk a thousand miles. Willing to break God's law. Just to get a little more.

Except that the water that sin provides just leaves us thirsty again. So we drink more and we're still thirsty and we drink more and we're still thirsty. And we can't stop drinking because it's become like water to us. You feel like you need it to survive. Shut off the water and you just become more desperate.

The only way to stop drinking water from one source is to replace with another. The only way for the Israelites to give up the water of Egypt was to drink the water from the rock that God provided. The only way for the Samaritan woman to give up her life of sin and adultery was to drink from the living water that Jesus provided.

Living water that, like the water from the rock, was not based on anything the woman did but on what God was doing for her. Living water based on the knowledge that the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the world had come for her. Had sat down and talked to her.

And even in the midst of her sinfulness. Even in the midst of her adultery and lies and tremendous thirst for sin. He had still offered the gift of salvation to her. He had still told her that the Father was seeking people just like her to worship him.

That is living water. Living water is the Savior of the world coming down out of heaven telling you every single sinful thing you have ever done. And then saying, "I have something better for you. My Father has something better for you. You don't need to be thirsty anymore."

St Paul tells us that "*we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" As long as the Israelites refused to trust in God's provision, they would never know peace. They would always be filled with the fear of death. As long as that Samaritan woman lived in sin and guilt, she would never know peace. She would always be filled with rejection and temptation.

But in Jesus, we know peace. The peace that comes from the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts as living water. The peace that comes from a God who provides for our every need of body and soul. The peace that comes from a God who died and rose again, that we might live without the guilt of sin. Without the feeling of rejection. Without the frustration of temptation.

Through Jesus Christ, we have peace with God. And that means we have peace in every other area of our life. Even when the world seems to be falling apart around us. Because by faith we have gained access to the grace of God. And now we live in the hope of the glory of God.

Now we live in the hope that neither drought nor famine, neither war nor violence, neither plague nor pestilence, nor anything in all of creation can separate us from God's love. While we were still weak, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. If he loved us that much then, how much more so does he love us now that we have been made his Baptized and forgiven people.

I'm sure there are probably a few of you wondering how my earlier story ends. It's not a miraculously happy ending. But it's not a sad ending either. The pastor feels pity for her, but he can't do much. Neither he nor the church have the money to pay all her past due water bills.

But what he can do is let her into the church during the day through the front door. Let her fill up her bottles of water not as a criminal sneaking into the basement. But as an invited guest filling them from the kitchen sink upstairs. And, in the process, gaining the opportunity to help her carry them to her home. And to talk to her about a man who offers her living water. So that she and her children will never go thirsty again. Amen.