

Pastor Troy E. Medlin
Lent 3, Year A
3/12/23
Grace, River Forest

Living from the Rock

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Give me this water always. Today.

I read recently “When Cheryl Watson, Marcelina Pedraza, and MariCarmen Macias talk about tap water, it can trigger a flood of worries. As lifelong residents of Chicago, these women have each come face-to-face with the ongoing drinking water crisis affecting their city. And the 400,000 lead pipes that caused it are still in use.

Illinois has as many as 1.4 million lead service lines, more than any other state in the nation. Black and Latino Illinoisans are disproportionately impacted by the state’s contaminated water, twice as likely to live in neighborhoods with lead service lines as white residents. The problem is acute in Chicago, where the city required the use of lead service lines until Congress banned them in 1986.”

In the middle of the night, after a run, or throughout the day, we take for granted that we can turn on our faucet and clean, safe, water will flow out for us. Yet, there are still barriers, borders, boundaries, whether geographic, political, or theological that keep people from *being able to quench their thirst*.

What are you thirsting for? In your gut? Heart?

In the words of preacher Gail O’Day, “in moving from John 3 to 4, Nicodemus to the Samaritan, the lectionary moves us from the religious and social center to the religious and social periphery. From Jerusalem, the seat of religious orthodoxy to Samaria, the seat of religious dissidence. The constant is the presence of Jesus and his offer of himself, and abundant life. Today.

Wednesday was international women's day. It is worth noting that Jesus chooses this woman to have his longest conversation in the gospel of John. Engaging her on personal, political, and theological topics. And, at the end of their conversation she goes on ahead to her village. There she blazes the trail for Mary Magdalene and all women who have proclaimed the gospel throughout the ages, even while those in authority denied the call God had given them. She becomes the first evangelist. The liberating word has spoken life to her.

What would that life look like for you?

We all long for that.

Like the Samaritan women we find ourselves around many a well in the heat of the day. Sun beating down on us and our past, expectations, and judgements of others weigh heavy upon us. We are parched.

Between our own sinful striving and the world's systems we are left only yearning for a taste of true freedom more often than not.

As someone else noted, "We all search in the wrong place for refreshment, lugging home water which gives out or goes bad; we continuously need more water; we are always somewhat thirsty, dirty or raw. We thought to find water there, down at the stream. There is no such water there." Where have you gone searching for water but to no avail? What has been given to you by others that only leaves your mouth dry and your heart like a desert?

We do not learn her name but we can imagine all that she had carried. All that had been given to her and said to her. In so many ways we can see fragments of ourselves in her face worn and weathered as it must have been.

There are cups handed to us by others. It seems we are forced to drink the bitter liquid of shame and isolation. And we feel like the world has placed an invisible label of "second class citizen" upon us either because of our age or place, etc.

Then there are those we find for ourselves.

Maybe it is the long and winding path of control and security that you have traversed searching for wells deep enough to meet those desires at whatever cost. Even if it meant shutting the door on the needs of the world or our own relationships.

For so many of us we attempt to slake our thirst by consuming either substances or things. Assuming that either will give us what we want the most. Yet we just wander like our ancestors in the wilderness.

Since at least the third century this well in Samaria has led Christians to an even deeper, trustworthy well. Where Christ meets us as Living Water that never runs dry. In that pool of mercy we have been submerged. Joined to his death and resurrection. The Love of God poured into your heart as Paul says. Forgiveness and freedom are birthrights for you who have emerged from that font that Christians have called both your tomb and your womb. You are a Child of God. No second class citizens here. Only fellow members of Christ's body on earth. Barriers, borders, and boundaries that we have constructed have been washed away by Living Water. So stop trying to reconstruct them. Just dive in and find your place in his mighty, gracious, and healing tide. You belong. You have been justified by faith- given you by God in your death in that eight sided tomb.

Let go and drink from Christ who gives himself to you again this day in word, bread, wine, and in refreshing relationships. And rise again each day with psalm 95 echoing as we go.

For us, born from his wounded side, we know that from every death we experience each day- large and small, brought on by myriad things, the impossibility of life will spring up.

Like the Samaritan before us we need not let the past hold us captive but move into the future with Christ. Using our bodies to proclaim this good news in all her vulnerability and power.

Walking wet, saving water spilling out from our hearts we find joy in offering this water to others. In community we make our way to parched places within and without- letting that water from the rock sustain us down every path. That water even loosens our lips and brings tears to our eyes as we are compelled to speak on behalf of those who long for clean drinking water. A drink of dignity in a sea of demands. Words of life in a world where some only hear of death.

It is death defying hope we embody as we live under that flood and in the fold of our shepherd. We await the day when all creation will be able to say in their own voices, "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."

This water is here for you. Today.