

Pastor Troy E. Medlin
Lent 3, Year A
Grace, River Forest
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Refreshed

I have a confession to make. I don't think this is too scandalous-- but I don't use a water filter at home. I just drink water straight from the tap. Call me a tap water connoisseur if you will (better than calling me too lazy to use a filter.)

In the spirit of civic camaraderie and connecting with neighbors-- I bet we could have a lot of fun if we organized a "tap water tasting" competition of sorts across municipalities. What is the flavor profile of your town's tap water?

The thing about drinking from the tap, is that your taste buds are keenly attuned to the finer aspects of gritty, or dirty, or crisp and clean.

I've been lucky to live in places with good water, but I've tasted some that even compel me to reach for the bottled variety. Water and geography. Space and place, borders and boundaries swirl around the details of this exchange.

One scholar points out there are multiple stories in the old testament about meetings that happen around a well and they follow a set storyline. A man travels to a foreign land, meets a woman at a well, and they discuss water. Once water has been drawn, the woman leaves the well to tell her community about the man.

In the heat of the day Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman. We've seen this before. We don't know where she has been or all that is in her past. She is given no name. The details we have show someone longing for dignity and something that will last. Staying power. This conversation is not about sin but about healing from shame and alienation. It is about a welcome that goes beyond acceptance. Jesus tells her everything she has ever done. This *knowledge* is not law but gospel. This isn't about judgement but about someone who finally sees her in her fullness and loves her without exception or agenda. It feels refreshing as it finds its way into her heart.

You know when you are thirsty and running errands, being productive, putting it off, and then you finally take a drink and you can feel the water travel all the way down your body?

In their conversation- the longest that Jesus shares in the gospels he offers not just water- but living water.

How often do we go back to those old faucets thinking maybe this time what drips out will satisfy and nourish even though it never has? Faucets like resentment and revenge. Or we go back relentlessly to a relationship that we think will fix us or a self destructive habit or disposition that this time will give us the validation and attention we crave. In perpetuity we turn on the faucet of war believing the lie that violence is what makes us strong and exceptional because we lack the imagination to see that another way is possible. It tastes like death no matter how often we return to it or flavor it with harmful theology. Even if certain officials claim it is a holy war- or that it will hasten the return of Christ. That will not hasten the return of our crucified savior who died on the cross forgiving his enemies out of love for the whole world and who comes among us now in bread, wine, water, outcast and stranger. The one who traverses borders and boundaries until no one is left out. "Holy war" might usher in the return of some gods but not Jesus Christ.

When Jesus offers living water she knows that this is what she desires.

The thing about living water is that it is- living. Flowing, in motion. It is going somewhere. So for the Samaritan woman anyway. New dignity equals new courage, new faith equals new risk. New risk turns into boldness. The new geography of the soul doesn't leave her stuck. New protocols. New encounters. Change. Growth. Standing tall and on the move. She becomes the first evangelist in John. A forerunner to Mary Magdalene.

Stagnant water is no place for baptized children of God to sulk.

This weekend, 13 confirmation students are at Lutherdale Bible Camp. In a change of rhythm and place, on retreat, they are drinking living water. Unplugging and refreshed in a world that places so many demands and expectations on them. Learning to rest in their belovedness. The theme is "being imitators of God." Seen and welcomed by God we become living water for others. God's love poured into us so we can water other soil. Whose presence or words have been like Moses' staff for you-- striking the rock so that living water could wash over you like a healing stream? The Greek word for salvation in the new testament is where we get the word salve. Like repairing or treating a wound. We experience living water as healing. Being put back together from the inside out. A balm. Washing away all that does not sustain and nourish and lead us forward.

When I was in cross country we would do our weekly long runs at Silver Springs state park. After exploring the trails we would almost instinctively find our way to the park's namesake. The natural springs. We would wade into/ the shallow stream, bend down, cup some water into our hands and drink. We knew where to find the living water. Marked with the cross, like a GPS, may we have the courage to follow its coordinates to where we know our thirst will be quenched. Embraced into the vine, sustained by infusing rain, we become connoisseurs of living water.

