

Year A – Lent Three – 19 March 2017
Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

The Israelites were thirsty. They had been walking through the desert, following Moses and wondering more and more if they had made the right decision. They were thirsty – thirsty for the cool, wet water that would quench their dry, parched throats and thirsty as well for some truth, some understanding about where they were going and if it was really going to be worth all of this intense effort – efforts that seemed to be getting them nowhere. They were thirsty and they needed life-giving water.

The Samaritan woman at the well was thirsty too but not like the Israelites. She didn't have to wonder about when and where she would get her next sip of cool, refreshing water. She could walk to the well whenever she needed. Her thirst could be quenched at any time, or so she thought.

How often are you thirsty? Do you find yourself parched, licking your lips, trying to wet your throat and finding that awful dryness that comes in the heat and dust of summer? Or have you ever craved a cool, clean glass of water when the sweat is pouring off your brow and you realize that all of your hydration is exiting through your pores? ... And how often are you thirsty and don't even know it? Maybe you find yourself tired and grumpy, have difficulty focussing on the task at hand, your eyes start to blur and you realize that you have gone all day without having a drink of anything. You were just too busy to remember ...

Our bodies are made up of about 60% water. We need water for digestion, to keep our membranes moist, to allow cells to grow, reproduce and survive, to flush out waste, to manufacture hormones and neurotransmitters, to regulate our body temperature, to act as a shock absorber for our brain and spinal cord, to lubricate joints and to deliver life-giving oxygen all over the body. Water is as necessary for life as breath is. But how often do we really pay attention to how much water we take in?

I was reminded the other day about the need our bodies have to take in water regularly, even if we don't feel thirsty. I was told that when we actually become aware that we are thirsty, we are already dehydrated. By the time we recognize something is missing, we have already allowed our bodies to suffer from our lack of care and attention.

Something as simple as water has a significant impact on every part of our lives! It's amazing, isn't it?

So, what is this water that the Israelites, the Samaritan woman and Jesus were really talking about? It wasn't simply H₂O. They were really talking about that which gives life, that which provides strength, that which propels us forward into the gift of what God has lying before us, waiting just ahead of us ...

This water is faith. It is that belief we have in Jesus Christ that he has forgiven us our sins, that he has provided for us a place in eternity, a love that transcends anything and everything we have ever known or experienced...

The Israelites, wandering in the desert, began to forget both what it was they were walking toward and what it was they were walking away from. Because they were unable to see the end of their journey, they became fearful and distrustful. They became thirsty for the fulfilment of the promises that God seemed to have made through Moses. And as their fear

gained purchase and their distrust grew, they began to look back, with muddy glasses, at what they had left behind. They forgot how difficult and life-draining their former situation had been and they began to yearn for the past. They forgot that they had been thirsty for something more when they had been enslaved in Egypt. And they forgot that God had promised them clear and life-giving water if they were to follow Him.

The Samaritan woman was also thirsty but she didn't seem to know it. Hers was not the dry-mouth, parched throat kind of thirst. Hers was that subtle, unhealthy thirst that sneaks in and dries out your body when you aren't even aware. Her thirst for something more wasn't as pressing as that of the Israelites because she hadn't paid that much attention to it. She was thirsty for that pure love that comes not from human relationships – marriages that cannot bring salvation. She was in dire need of a love that would fill her soul the way water will seep into nooks and crannies and open spaces wherever they may be. She was a woman in need of a water that would wash away her sins and bring her to an immersion in a love so great that it could save her soul and bring her everlasting, eternal peace. Her thirst was for that which only Jesus could give.

As you and I walk along this Lenten path, our journey to Jerusalem, our moments of pause at the foot of the cross, and then our triumphal celebration at the empty tomb, we need to make sure our water bottles are constantly filled. We have to be vigilant in recognizing that sometimes, all too often, we become dehydrated and we aren't even aware of it.

How is it that we become thirsty? What is it we are neglecting that we sometimes find ourselves yearning spiritually for something even when we don't acknowledge the need for it practically? We become thirsty for faith. We forget about prayer and our souls become dehydrated. There is only so long that we can keep on going when we neglect to drink from that wellspring of life-giving water. When we forgo our time in prayer it is like we walk right past the full glass of sparkling water sitting on the counter as we hustle out the door, busy with life. We can indeed keep going for a while, even when we don't take time to hydrate our souls with prayer, but after a while our souls become so thirsty that we will find ourselves flagging. Our sense of hope may begin to slip. Our belief that God is present and watching over us may begin to fade. Our focus on worship and our ability to give thanks might start to drop until we find we are spiritually listless and unable to do what we hoped we could do.

For Christians, prayer is that beautiful tonic, that crystal-clear water, which fills our souls back up and brings clarity of vision and new found vitality to our lives of faith and life in general. When we fill our reservoirs with prayer, we are allowing God to give us that which we need to allow the cells of our faith to grow and mature, to provide shock protectors for us when life gets hard and bumpy. Prayer lubricates the muscles and joints of our faith and enables us to drop to our knees in prayer whenever and wherever we need it. Prayer is the water that nourishes us as we continue to follow Jesus and learn to live a life more fully in faith.

What of those who are not Christians yet? Or even those who have been baptized but have drifted away from the faith? What kind of thirst must they have? Their thirst more surely resembles that of the Israelites, wandering in the wilderness, forgetting what it was that drew them out of Egypt in the first place. Their thirst is not the insipid thirst of us becoming quietly dehydrated. Theirs is a thirst that parches their throats, stops them in their tracks and causes

them to cry out in anguish and despair, wondering where they are and how they might find hope

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There are so many people all around us – in our world, in our neighbourhoods, in our buildings and workplaces, and even in our families – who do not understand that there is an elixir for their sorrows. They have not yet been shown that great well-spring of life-giving waters that can be found in Jesus Christ. Their thirst is not just an inconvenience. Their thirst is killing their souls. Their dehydration is so profound that only urgent attention is necessary.

God has placed the well of life-giving water in their midst but no one has ever given them the cup with which to draw that water. You and I are the cup-bearers. You and I are the ones who are sitting on the edge of the well, dipping that cup in from which we sip the water of Life. But we must go one step further. We must begin offering that cup to others. And once they have tasted the cup, proffered from our hands, then we need to show them how to use that cup for themselves.

You and I are called to make sure we remain hydrated through constant prayer, and then we are called to (1) offer the gift of Jesus' life-giving water to others, (2) show them how to lift that cup, how to pray and have faith, and then (3) show them where they can find both a cup of their own and the abundance of wells from which Jesus invites them to drink. The church, any church, is a location for a well, but so is a prayer group, a Bible Study, a Christian men's gathering or a Christian women's lunch. Wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name and where they faithfully pray and uphold one another in faith, there is a well – one which holds the life-giving water that Jesus offers to all who acknowledge they are thirsty and who are willing to sip the water of eternal life.

We are all some degree of thirsty. I welcome you, along this Lenten journey, to pay attention to your soul and determine how thirsty you are and then drink deeply of the waters of faith and hope and love that Jesus offers us. And then, when your thirst has been quenched, go out and share with others how easy it is to become rehydrated and renewed through Jesus Christ our Lord.