

Sermon for Sunday, March 19, 2017 - "Thirst"

Third Sunday in Lent
March 19, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
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Thirst

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus who gives living water.

She has so many reasons to be thirsty as she approaches that well.

Day after day, night after night, she has swallowed salty tears, weeping until she is completely drained. Five marriages have ended. Now she's dependent on a man who has not married her - a tenuous situation in the ancient world. She's at the mercy of harsh, battering winds - forces beyond her control.

She hadn't gone to the well that morning, when it was still cool, with the other women. They must have talked and laughed and commiserated and found refreshment in one another.

Instead she sets out for the well, alone, in the heat of the day. There, she'll find water but not the deeper replenishment she needs.

Any quenching of her thirst will be temporary. She'll have to return day after day, over and over and over again, to fetch water and carry it home.

The repetition, the drudgery, the tediousness of it all leaves her depleted.

She has so many reasons to be thirsty.

What is depleting you? When do you notice your own thirst? Does it feel like loneliness, weariness, despair, grief? Are you longing for change, for connection? Are you drained by the daily grind, battered by forces beyond your control? As she approaches the well, she sees Jesus sitting there. There's no reason to expect anything renewing from him. He is a Jew. He won't talk to her or help her fill her jar. He'll just ignore her, a woman of Samaria. Jews and Samaritans despise each other. He'll think even God isn't accessible to her - that she and her people worship God the wrong way. He'll judge her.

What do you expect from Jesus? What do you expect from encounters with people who are very different from you, from people who worship God differently? Will you be replenished or further depleted?

She expects nothing but disdain. So, she's startled when he asks her for a drink - when he wants something from her.

She starts asking questions of him. He engages her in a discussion about God. Their conversation is lively,

refreshing, renewing. He talks about living water - water that gives the deeper replenishment she needs. He sees and names the pain of her relationships. He speaks of a new way to worship God - in spirit and truth. When she talks about the coming Messiah, he says, "I am he"; and, actually, the word "he" is not in the Greek text. He says, "I AM."

Jesus claims the name used for God from the beginning of Jewish and Samaritan history - I AM. He uses the name he will use again and again in the Gospel of John: "I AM the Bread of Life, I AM the Resurrection and the Life, I AM the Good Shepherd ...". She, the woman of Samaria, is the first person in the Gospel of John to learn Jesus' deeper name.

There, among her thirst, her weariness, her questions about where to find God, she encounters God. God is standing there, right in front of her, asking her for a drink, engaging her in conversation.

In this unexpected encounter, she is given living water - water that flows into all the parched places of her life, all the emptiness, all the fatigue.

She is renewed from deep within. Today, God meets us here as well - even when we show up with very low expectations; even when we're full of questions, even when we're depleted, even when our lives are a mess, even when we don't want anyone to ask anything more of us. Even then, especially then, even now, God meets us here.

God engages us in conversation around the scriptures - in word and song. God comes to us in the body and blood of Jesus. God nourishes us with food and drink that flows into all the parched places of our lives.

And God shows up out in the world, as well, in unexpected ways. God shows up in the people who ask us for a drink of water, those who need something from us, and those who are different from us. As we give the cup of cold water, as we engage in conversation, as we ask for help, we encounter God.

After her encounter with Jesus, the woman of Samaria leaves her jar at the well and runs to share this living water she has received with her community. "Come and see," she says. Those are the very same words Jesus uses when calling his disciples, "come and see." She becomes the first person to share the good news of Jesus, the first evangelist.

Because of her testimony, other Samaritans do come and see. They ask Jesus to stay with them, to abide with them - something that the Gospel of John shows us is essential to Jesus' ministry. She provides an opportunity for the people of her city to abide with Jesus. She helps them to encounter God, to drink deeply of living water themselves.

We too can invite others to come and see the ways God meets us - in worship, in conversation, in people in need. We can provide opportunities for others to abide with Jesus - to abide in hope and peace, to drink in his life-giving presence. We can engage people in conversations in which we see them and their thirst and wrestle together with big questions about God.

Of course, we aren't always able to do this. There are times we simply need to be replenished. Yet over time, together, we are renewed and sent out to share living water.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer. Our time of prayer will continue into the introduction of the hymn.

