

“Of Streams and Living Water”

Jeremiah 17: 5 – 8

John 4: 5 – 15

March 19, 2017

Rev. Dalene Vasbinder

Dry. Scorching heat. Dust blows across fields and you can almost see the crops wither. The air so hot that it almost burns to move through it. In El Salvador, there are two seasons; the rainy season and the dry season. During the dry season, the hot wind blows covering everything with dust; sandaled feet covered with dust as you walk, dust in your eyes, nose, everything brown, brown, brown. Except for down at the river.

Down by the river's edge, during the dry season only just a stream but still where everyone escapes during the dry times. It was the only cool place around. Cooled the body, gave life to the soul because there was life down by the water, there were a variety of shades of green to sore eyes that had only seen brown. Walking down the hill from the refugee camp where I lived, I could see the river down below. Well, not exactly the water, but I knew it was there because of the line of green green trees. Trees that had roots deep in the banks, firmly planted, trees that seemed to almost stand tall and proud with the knowledge that they would survive, as all else shriveled and choked above them on the waterless hillsides. Those trees, planted by the water, not only survived but thrived! Because, you see, the river wasn't dependent on the fickle rain. During the rainy season, it flowed out of its banks, rapidly, dangerously at times. But even during the dry season, when it was only a stream, there was water because the river was made up of 'agua nacida', natural springs along the side that would bubble up to feed the riverbed and the trees. The trees were planted by this 'agua nacida', this water that would never dry up, would never die, this 'living water', sending out their roots by the stream, not fearing when the heat comes, their leaves staying forever green, never ceasing to bear fruit.

And the prophet Jeremiah, perhaps quoting from Psalm 1, writes,
“Blessed are those who trust in God, whose trust is in God.
They shall be like a tree planted by water,
Sending out its roots by the stream.
Not fearing when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green;
Not anxious in the year of drought, never ceasing to bear fruit.”

Not fearing, not anxious. Always fruit bearing. Oh, it would be so nice to be planted by that water.

The woman in John's story had no river to escape to. Rather, she was a part of the dry, scorching landscape and her story took place during the hottest part of the day. Noontime, full sun beating down. A time when most people stayed in the shade, under cover, not a time to go out to the well to draw water. But there she was, in the heat of the day. Avoiding the stares of others perhaps? Not wanting to face the chit chat conversation, the questions, the reality of her pain of being an outcast because her husbands had died. She was lesser than, not the other women's equals, and so she went to the well at noontime because she was thirsty and needed

water. Her life was so dry, dead, filled with the fear and anxiety of her rootlessness. She was so thirsty.

And there he was. Leaning against the well as if he owned it, asking for water. Talking to her, a Samaritan and a woman, unheard of! She replied, “You have not bucket and the well is deep.”, In the words of author Alyce McKenzie, her reply is in effect, “The task is monumental and you do not have the means to accomplish it.” She was no fool! She took one surface look and knew that he didn’t have what it took quench his thirst. But of course, this story isn’t about outward appearances or surface meanings, it speaks to a deeper spiritual level.

He offered her living water so that she would never thirst again. At first, she did not understand his speaking in metaphors. But then as he continued talking to her, telling her her own life story, that he really knew her and all that had transpired in her life, all the pain and agony, as he named all of that, she felt as if he had known her since her first breath, knew her inside and out and was still standing there talking with her, accepted her, loved her any way. How many seconds or minutes it took for her to suddenly understand that he wasn’t talking about quenching her dry tongue thirst but that thirst deep down inside that was always there because she never quite felt she was good enough, that she WAS enough. She was after all, a woman, a Samaritan, an outsider, a sinner. But his care and compassion touched that dry place in her heart. Living water. His words were living water quenching her thirst. Her thirst for acceptance, for forgiveness, for understanding, for assurance that how she was living just on the surface was not all there was to life, was being quenched by this living water.

And she said to him, “Give me this living water, so that I may never thirst again.” Haven’t we all at one time or another been the woman at the well?

During our Lenten journey, we are doing a bit of ‘soul gardening’; preparing ourselves to be ready for the seeds of Easter, that resurrection promise of new life to not only be planted but thrive and grow and bloom within us. But we need to be careful, we need to make sure that we don’t have dehydration of the soul.

Have you ever been dehydrated? It usually doesn’t happen all at once, but sneaks up on you if you’re not caring for yourself properly. There are warning signs; often a headache or just not feeling right. Not yourself.

Dehydration of the soul may be similar. A kind of sneaking up on us. We don’t realize we have an ache or just aren’t feeling ‘right’; until maybe a crisis of one kind or another hits and we end up in a kind of ‘Spiritual Emergency Room’; bottomed out in loneliness or fear or confusion or inadequacy and we realize, we are thirsty, oh we are so very thirsty.

Or maybe it’s those times when we are on life’s treadmill and running so hard, so very hard, just trying to keep up, spending money on things that we think will make us happy, living the American dream of getting ahead, so busy that we forget that we are thirsty. Thirsty for love and community and acceptance and grace – all of those things that really make us whole and help our soul’s garden to thrive. Or maybe those times of the ordinary in life, where the day is pretty much going as usual, where most things are predictable, but deep down inside we are thirsty for more, thirsty for Mystery and Awe that makes us able to see the extra-ordinary that surrounds us

all of our days. Are you thirsty? Would you like some living water so that you will never thirst again?

Lent is a time to look at the condition of our inner selves, to confess the ways that we have strayed away from God and become thirsty for that which really gives meaning and value in our lives, become thirsty for that living water, the way of Jesus that points away from self and points to serving others, the way of love and care and forgiveness and compassion. Are you thirsty?

Just a few moments ago I read from the second half of our reading from the prophet Jeremiah, the part about being like a tree planted by the water. If you remember correctly, the reading actually began with it's opposite: cursed are you – thirsty, hurting, wanting are you – who do not have those deep roots of trusting in God, this living water (my addition, not spoken of in Jeremiah). When we live on the surface, living our days in our own worries and perspective, so immersed in the day to day, just looking down as we put one foot in front of the other, we forget to look up, and we miss the blossoms of Springs beginnings, the wonders of each day, and gratitude for life and breath and relationship and community and all that around us just doesn't fit in with our daily routine and then, all of a sudden, we are thirsty, oh so very thirsty.

“Would you like some living water?”

Would you like to be as a tree planted by water, with roots so deep that even during the driest season of the soul, you survive?

In this season, we are called to repent, which means to turn toward God. We are reminded to pause in a time of self examine, to ask ourselves what in our lives or our thinking makes us turn away from the source of living water that is love that is life that is a message that each of us is enough, that each of us is a child of God? Perhaps we can in this next week set aside some time of quiet, to let the words that we are about to sing be our prayer, that we may open ourselves to that source of living water.

Amen