



*Dying of Thirst*  
*Exodus 17:1-7 & John 4:5-42*

*Third Sunday in Lent, Sunday, March 15th, 2020*  
*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*  
*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

*Text: Is the LORD among us or not? (Exodus 17:7b)*

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who is it that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." (John 4:10)

For a couple of months I've been doing hot yoga on Friday mornings. "A man of your age?" some people ask with a shocked expression. Others simply say, "Eeew!" Then they ask "How hot is it?" I try to locate my yoga mat in the back of the room near the thermostat. From my observation the class begins with a room temperature between 88 and 92 degrees and gets to about 98 to 102 degrees by the end of class. I've learned that heat is a matter of mind over matter; if you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

The first time that I attended the class I did not know that I was supposed to bring water. This was a mistake, obviously not fatal, but a mistake nevertheless. I was not only soaked but slightly dehydrated. It took me a couple of days to become fully hydrated.

There are in life two kinds of thirst: physical and spiritual. In our Old Testament lesson, no sooner had the people who would become Israel left the chains of Egyptian slavery behind than they find themselves in a wilderness desert with no water. They are thirsty and complain to Moses. "Did you bring us out here to die of thirst as well as our children and cattle?" Moses turned to God, "God, help me. We are thirsty and they are about to stone me. I do not know what to do?"

The Lord responded to Moses and reminded him of the staff that he used to strike the Nile River and turn it blood red. "Take your staff and go, with elders from the people, to a rock that I will show you. Strike the rock and water will flow from it." Moses did as God said and the people had water to drink.

But there was also a spiritual thirst in this story for the people of Israel found themselves between a Promise and Fulfillment. The wilderness was not just a place but a state of mind. (Terence E. Fretheim, Working Preacher commentary of Exodus 17: 1-7) “Is the Lord among us or not?” Moses asked. Do we believe that God is with us not only in our mountaintop experiences but even when we walk through Life’s dark valleys of fear and doubt, turmoil and trouble? “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for,” the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews said, “(and) the conviction of things not seen.” (11:1)

In the gospel lesson context is important. Each of the gospel writers took the stories of Jesus that were familiar to their own faith community and wove them into a narrative, a type of catechism, if you will, in order to tell others who Jesus is. In the case of the Gospel of John, at the end of the 20th chapter the writer states that Jesus did many other things that are not written in this gospel, but that “these things” were written so that the readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, and in believing have life.

In John’s gospel there is an overriding motif of light and darkness. From the opening chapter we read that Jesus is the light of God that shines in the darkness of the broken world. Those who come to the light are children of God, but unfortunately much of the world preferred darkness because of their deeds.

Immediately before today’s lesson we have the story of a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a teacher who should have known who Jesus wasn’t but who didn’t. He comes to Jesus under that veil of darkness. He doesn’t understand; he doesn’t understand that the movement of God is like the wind; we do not know where it comes from or where it goes but we can feel it on our skin and see it in the world around us. It seems that at the end of chapter 3 Nicodemus is left in the dark. In all fairness to him, though, at the end of John’s gospel Nicodemus accompanies Joseph of Arimathea to claim the broken body of Jesus after the crucifixion. It would seem, then, that eventually Nicodemus walked in the light of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ.

Contrast the story of Nicodemus with the story of a Samaritan woman who approaches Jesus in the bright light of the noonday sun. Nothing is hidden, and in her encounter with Jesus the woman quickly realized that Jesus knew her as nobody else ever had. Jesus knew her in the same way that the Psalmist spoke of God in the 139th Psalm. “I saw you being knit together in your mother’s womb...I saw you being formed in the depths of the earth...I knew the number of your days before even one existed.”

Through the centuries the unnamed Samaritan woman has been portrayed in an ignoble light. But there is no sense of shame here. Rather Jesus knew that she had been a woman unlucky in love either because of death, divorce or both. You may remember that according to the custom of Levirate marriage, a widowed woman with no heirs was taken into the household of her husband's brother.

As she begins to see Jesus as a prophet she returns to her village to tell others. At this same time the disciples, those who walked with Jesus, saw what he did, and heard what he taught returned to Jesus without having told anyone anything about him. They stayed in their own little comfort zone. Speaking to the disciples then, and, I believe us today, Jesus said,

“Look around you and see that the fields are ripe for harvest.” There are many people in our community who do not know the unconditional love of God revealed in Jesus. There are people who have been judged and found wanting by their communities. There are people who are hungry, physically and spiritually, and need to be fed, fed by our actions and words, if that be necessary. We are called to be the laborers who both sow the seeds of God's love and reap the harvest of the seed that had been sown by others before us.

In this season of Lent, let us not give something up but rather invite someone in.

To God be the glory. Amen.