

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

How often do we find ourselves around folks who constantly have a bottle of water in their possession? How often is this bottle a commercial bottle of water extracted by some commercial company that is only interested in extracting a gross profit from a plentifully available source in the community where the bottler is located? And how often is the water being extracted without concern for the locale where the water is extracted in the first place?

Sadly, this is becoming a problem throughout the United States as large commercial firms like Nestles rape the local communities where they extract at very low cost the water that they can then turn around and sell to consumers at an outrageous upcharge without fear of recourse because they have bought and paid for the local resources and the local politicians in their greed.

It is a shameful place that we find ourselves in these days as the aquifers are drained and companies with no ties to the local community and who have no care for the local community are only interested in the profits that they can extract from the local resources... who are they to care what this wanton disregard of the local resource will have on the local economy once they have sucked the local resources dry and will then be on their merry way with no regard for the damage that they leave behind?

Regardless of how it comes about, people are carrying and drinking water constantly. Maybe we have taken seriously the stories of thirst we read today and conclude we should always have a source of hydration on hand, but I

suspect this phenomenon has more to do with attempts at weight loss and the infamous doctor's recommendation to drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day.

We live in a time when the lack of clean water is becoming a crisis. Parts of the country are rationing water, and it seems clear that farming will look different in the next decade, as the demand for water for the extraction of fossil fuels and large-scale farming begins to severely restrict the water available for people to acquire and use for daily living. Access to water defines what property has value, and in some societies makes women and children vulnerable to attack as they venture far to acquire their daily water. Would that there were stones today that we could break for living water! In other parts of the world, the water rises to dangerous levels, and people seek shelter from dangerous flooding. In many cases here in North America, this is becoming an all too familiar phenomenon. In our community, we are thankful for the establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority at the height of the depression and the effect that their dams and flood control projects have had on the cycle of flooding that was at one time a constant in the Tennessee River Valley.

Water comforts and cleanses, as well as destroys by its abundance or scarcity. We are utterly dependent on water, and we illustrate that dependence as we carry it around in plastic bottles, sucking on it for dear life. Particularly when engaging in rigorous physical training or exertion, we need to stay hydrated, lest our efforts at transformation be compromised by a lack of essential fluid.

This Sunday of Lent, we particularly note how spiritual hydration is essential for the transformation we seek. In today's readings the people and then Jesus are simply thirsty. In response to their thirst, they ask for water. It seems reasonable to me. New life is offered to the Samaritan woman in this

ancient site where she and Jesus share common origins, Jacob's well, and all the people of her town are invited to know Jesus through her good news. The Hebrew people point out that they need water, which invites Moses into a conversation with God that creates from his despair water from a stone.

So many stories of the Bible are stories of water. From creation to the river of life in the end time, we are a people whose spirituality is framed in the cleansing and life-giving qualities of water. Yet, we seem to be experiencing a parching lack of spiritual water in our lives today.

The woman in this story, despite all that has happened to her in her life to cause her to avoid the community well during the cooler part of the day, is seeking a living water that can cool her soul and quench her spirit, even though she will avoid admitting that to this itinerant Rabbi of the southern kingdom that she encounters in the noon-day sun.

Despite what may have been considered a strike against her by the community where she lived, Jesus never condemned her. Instead, he offered her living water, a water that offered life instead of death and growth instead of stagnation.

Living water is what Christ offers to us today. He offers us life in the midst of death. Sustenance in the midst of carnage. Hope in the midst of despair.

In a time when we seem to be engulfed in the things that tear us apart, Jesus offers us the source of life that binds us together... with cords that cannot be broken. Jesus offers us the source of life and hope that comes solely in relationship to the God who seeks to restore relationship with us above all.

As I stated last Wednesday to the folks at Simpson United Methodist Church at their Lenten luncheon, the only things that are important are the relationships that come from living out our call to love God and love neighbor.

This woman at the well gets it. She gets that Jesus is more than a special Rabbi. More than a special teacher. She gets it that Jesus is someone who gets her. Who understands her and the pain that she has experienced in her life. She gets it that he not only understands the pain that she has experienced, but he doesn't hold that pain and her reaction to that pain against her. In fact he makes sure that she understands that she is forgiven of every wrong that she has ever committed.

Forgiveness is what Jesus is all about. Forgiveness is the first step toward restoration. And restoration to a right relationship with God is what Jesus is all about.

No matter what we have done. No matter how bad we feel about what we have done, Jesus tells us that we are forgiven. Jesus tells us that our relationship with the God of all creation, a relationship that we may believe is totally destroyed, is not destroyed at all.

As we proceed through this Lenten Season, may we experience the living water that Jesus shared with this woman and that Jesus wants to share with us. May our lives be open to the gushing river of living water that is offered to us.

Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.