

Exodus 17:1-7 & John 4:5-26

March 19, 2017

“Living Water for a Thirsty Soul”

- this week’s gospel reading ... the Samaritan woman at the well
- last week it was Nicodemus
 - if a person’s outward righteousness index were anything like their credit score, Nicodemus would be in the 800’s ... a triple “A” rating
 - the woman at the well was ... not such a good credit risk
 - she is a woman with no friends; an outcast in her town
 - she is a husband stealer
 - to any Jew, she is one of those half-breed, good for nothing, not to be trusted Samaritans
 - her credit score is ... in the toilet
- in reality, both of them are equally far from God
 - both are afflicted with deep spiritual needs
- but Jesus has a prescription for both of them
 - and the prescription is the same ... the water of life
 - she need living water
 - he needs to be born again by ... water and the Spirit
 - both are afflicted with a spiritual thirst
- what I really want to focus on today is the OT lesson
- God’s people had an overwhelming need in Exodus 17 ... what do we know about them?
 - they are God’s chosen people
 - they are the children of Abraham
 - yet they struggle at ever turn as they try to follow God in faith
 - earlier in Exodus, they were reluctant to leave Egypt
- they had no sooner started out on their journey when they caught a glimpse of Pharaoh’s army closing in on them
 - maybe Pharaoh will take us back ... 10 plagues ... maybe not

-but God delivered them ... Pharaoh and his army were destroyed in the Red Sea

-chapter 15 ... they celebrate and sing and dance ... "I will sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously ..."

-they broke camp and started out ... three days later they still had found no food

-so the people grumbled against the Lord
... what are we supposed to drink?

-God made the bitter waters sweet

-chapter 16 ... it's six weeks later

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

-so the Lord sent manna, and they all ate and were satisfied

-but more ... God said he would keep providing manna all through their journey ... and he did

-in Exodus 17 we come to our text ... and what are they doing?

-they are thirsty again ... the water has run out

-but there's a deeper problem ... their faith has run out too

-why did they find it so hard to trust in God and take hold of his promises?

-something interesting happened in the office this week that didn't click in my brain until well after I said it

-let me set the stage

-back in the summer the lease on our old copier came up for renewal and we had to decide if we would continue with the company we had been with for 10 years, or go with a new company

- the machines were similar, features, speed, quality, reliability
 - the costs were similar
 - so how did we finally decide?

- it came down to a matter of trust
 - in the ten years we had a contract with the old company, the service was great, the copier did what it was supposed to do, but there were a few irritants along the way
 - we would order paper ... they will deliver it tomorrow, but could not give us an arrival time
 - we could never be sure if we would still be here when the delivery came ... it was an outside service and it was hard to trust them
 - we would order toner ... they will send it tomorrow by courier
 - we could never be sure if we would still be here when the delivery came ... again it was an outside service and it was hard to trust them
 - in the end we went with the new company
 - they do their own deliveries
 - we can talk to an actual person in their office and explain that we have limited office hours ... and they promised that they would meet those times
 - they were scheduled to come on Friday with paper and toner and it was getting near noon and Pat was getting nervous in the office
 - what if they don't come
 - what if I have to wait around again like we used to do with the old company???

- I thought about it for a second and said, "they will be here, don't worry about it" and left it at that

- I thought about it later and it occurred to me ... why did I trust them?

- it was because they had never let us down ... they were reliable
 - they had a history of faithfulness

- so here's my next question ...
- what comes to mind when you listen to the OT reading this morning?
 - same old Israelites ... I've heard this song before
 - faithless, ungrateful bunch
 - how can they praise God for his gracious deliverance from slavery in Egypt, then turn around and doubt God for the small stuff?
 - they have been saved from death
 - they have been rescued from slavery
 - God has started them on the journey to the land promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob 400 years before

- has God ever let them down before?
 - have any of God's promises ever failed?
 - if God has always been faithful, why are they worried now?

- it's so easy to read this and think ... "don't be like them!"
 - or to think ... "thank God I'm not like them"
 - but all too often we are like them
 - all too often our trust in God fades when the road gets long

- we know that the devil works to assault us and rob us of the peace God wants us to have
- we know that God wants us to learn to ask and to pray ... he wants us to learn to trust him
 - we also know that whenever something bad happened to anybody in the OT, Satan was behind it
 - Cain and Abel ... brother against brother ... Satan
 - Jacob and Isaac ... child against parent ... Satan

-Israel and Judah ... nation against nation ... Satan
-his whole aim and purpose is to make people hurt

-but there's something else you have to see ... behind all of those things, stands someone else

-Romans 8:28 ... "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"

-in a world filled with strife and suffering, illness, death ... where is this peace with God that we are supposed to have?

-where did the Israelites go wrong?

-what do we need to do?

-do we see ourselves here?

-is this what we are like?

-do we try to take and steal what God wants to freely give us, if only we would wait on him and trust in him?

-Samaritan woman at the well has "been around"

-five husbands and now on to someone else

-what's she looking for?

-she's looking for a friend

-a life of contentment and fulfillment

-she is looking for a life that she hasn't found yet

-where do you find that life?

-Israelites thought that if only they could get out of Egypt, life would be better

-when they got out of Egypt they thought that if only they could go back to Egypt, life would be better

-are you thirsting for a better life?

-how does "better" happen?

- one of the things that the season of Lent should do is make us thirsty
 - when we come face to face with the unchangeable truth of God's law, we should get thirsty
 - we cry for and long for God's mercy and grace
 - our thirst ends when we drink the water that Jesus gives
 - our thirst ends when we are justified through faith
 - our thirst ends when God pours out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit
- whether it's the Israelites, or Nicodemus, or the woman at the well, God's people thirst and are refreshed when water pours from the rock
 - God brings deliverance in simple and unexpected ways
- we might at first think that the woman at the well was also an unlikely person to be the recipient of God's grace too
 - she was a Samaritan, and the Jews didn't much like the Samaritans
- normally when Jews would travel from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north, they would take the bypass route
 - they would cross the Jordan river into Perea, then north, then back across the Jordan again ... just to avoid Samaria
 - the Samaritans were descendent of the remnant of the Northern Kingdom who had intermarried with the foreigners brought in after 722 B.C. by the Assyrian conquerors
 - the new residents brought with them all kinds of foreign gods and idol worship
 - when the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon, the Samaritans did their best to interfere with the rebuilding of Jerusalem
- so much for the history lesson, except to say that this group were continually the object of Jewish scorn and hatred
- but now, as Jesus travels north, he intentionally goes through Samaria
 - he plans to stop at the well
 - he wants to talk with this woman

- what we see is the whole purpose for which Jesus came
 - he came to look for and seek out the lost
 - he came to bring them back to God in repentance and faith
 - to be a friend to the friendless
 - to provide the means for that return by his suffering and death for sinners
 - he came to bring living water for thirsty souls

- did this Samaritan woman need what Jesus had to offer?
 - she was an immoral woman leading an immoral life

- even more to the point, the welfare of her soul was not high on her list of priorities

- in her conversation with Jesus, her responses are almost predictable
 - she tries to change the subject
 - she points out all the problems that religion in general presents and has caused
 - it's ok to talk about religion, just not about me and what I believe
 - she tries to keep Jesus from getting too close or too personal

- yet she needs what Jesus has to give
 - she came out to draw water at noon
 - not the usual time
 - usually morning or evening, along with all the other women in the town
 - but she was not welcome with them
 - she is a husband stealer ... someone's mistress
 - here she is, out getting water at the hottest time of the day when no one else is around
 - she was alone ... she had no friends in town
 - she is a thirsty soul in desperate need of living water

- sin always separates people from God
 - it cuts us off from him
 - you and I would be eternally cut off from him had Jesus not come to be our Saviour
- everyone else had written her off, but Jesus didn't
 - quite the contrary ... Jesus went looking for her
 - to give her new hope and new life through the forgiveness of her sins
- how do we get this new hope and new life?
- how do we get the peace with God that Paul talks about in his epistle today?

- God doesn't sit around on his throne in heaven waiting for us to find our way back to him
 - Jesus didn't wait for the Samaritan woman to clean up her life and find her own way back to God
 - that can never happen by our own doing

- God is gracious
 - he makes the first move
 - he comes with his promises and his forgiveness
 - he comes with living water
 - water that makes us alive and cleanses us from sin and unrighteousness

- do you know what living water is?
 - it is the Gospel ... the promise of the forgiveness of sins earned by Jesus' death on the cross
 - it is life, freely poured out by God

- it is God's power that turns the heart from sin and plants faith
 - he does it through the power of his Word

- it worked for the woman at the well
 - even though she didn't understand it
 - even though she didn't know what Jesus was talking about
 - even though she tried every evasive manoeuvre she knew to avoid God and the whole subject of her sin
- she would have continued in sin, just as she was had the power of Jesus' Word not touched her heart
- we know it did touch her heart, because in the end it changed her life
- so, where are you in relation to Christ Jesus?
 - are you a thirsty soul in need of living water?
 - don't you know that our souls are restless until they find their rest in God

Psalm 62

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honour depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

- do you know what peace with God does?
 - the water of life quenches the fire of worry and helps us to live an unshaken life in the midst of a shaky world
 - the woman at the well thought she had to steal the love of five husbands in order to find peace and happiness
 - when it didn't work with one, she would move in with someone else
 - what we ultimately all thirst for is peace with God

- we will only find it by grace through faith in Jesus Christ
 - it is Christ who pours out his salvation through his blood and water
- God comes to his people today in his Word, Baptism, and Holy Supper to pour out life and salvation earned by his Son, stricken for us
- we all suffer afflictions and struggle with things that we did not bring on ourselves
 - violent weather
 - trouble at work
 - sickness
 - suffering along with others
- sometimes we struggle under afflictions that come from our own sinful nature
 - we rebel against God
 - we fail to trust him
 - we bring problems on ourselves
- 1 Corinthians 10:4 tells us that Christ was the rock in the wilderness
- if Jesus is the Rock, and the living water that thirsty souls need comes from the rock, then he is the one to whom we must come
- God sent his Son to be stricken to be our deliverance
 - now, as then, Christ is stricken and our thirst is quenched
 - his pierced side yields water and blood ...
 - they still flow!
 - the water flows in holy baptism
 - the blood flows in the Lord's Supper
- in this living water, we meet a new friend
 - his name is Jesus
 - he came to pour out his life for you
 - he came to bleed for you
 - he came to bring you peace with God
 - thanks be to God for his great gift