

### 3 LENT MARCH 27, 2011 CYCLE "A"

#### TITLE: LORD, GIVE ME THIS WATER

READINGS: Exodus 17:1-7, Ps. 95, Rom.5:1-11, John 4:5-42

There is no question that water is life. It is absolutely necessary for life not only here on earth but for hereafter as well. We cannot live without food or water. Nor can we live spiritually without the water of life Christ brings. Our first reading from Exodus was especially chosen to fit with our Gospel reading today. For it is there that Jesus promises the Samaritan woman that he will give her the water of life. In the extremely dry climate of Palestine, water was always the symbol of salvation. Without water there was no life no hope no salvation.

It is here in Exodus that we see the people of Israel crying out against Moses and against God for bringing them out into the wilderness where there is no water. Moses was in fear of his life and so he takes the problem to the Lord. God then commands Moses to take the staff with which he struck the Nile, when the sea parted before them, and strike the rock. Water would flow forth for the people. He then named the place both *Massah* and *Meribah*. *Massah* means "test" for the people tested their God and *Meribah* means "quarrel", for it was there that they quarreled with Moses and with God. The Israelites were a complaining people for this pattern is repeated three times in Exodus: 1) complaining for water (15:22-27) 2) complaining for food (16:1-36) and 3) today's complaint for water (17:1-7). The complaining people expresses a lack of trust in God and it is reflected in today's Psalm: "O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah as in the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your ancestors tested me and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work." Ps.95:8-9 Such a good lesson for us today, for we really need to examine ourselves in what ways we test or quarrel with our God and in what ways we show lack of trust.

It is in our Gospel pericope that we not only see the connection to the significance of water but also to our lack of trust in God and in our neighbors. Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well and acts in a way totally forbidden for the Jews and even the Samaritans for that matter. He not only speaks to the woman but he actually asks her for a drink of water. The problem was that any physical contact with a hated Samaritan, drinking water from a common bucket, or eating a meal together, would make a Jew ceremonially unclean. They would be unable to participate in temple worship. This is how a Pharisee would pray: "I thank

God that I am not a woman, a Gentile or a Samaritan,” and would pray that the Samaritans not be included in the resurrection. Certainly harsh, but not unlike some of the rejection and hatred believed and practiced today.

The exchange in today's gospel between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, “Give me a drink,” “Sir, give me this water,” “Go, call your husband,” “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet,” is tremendously startling not only then but even today. Unfortunately we still reflect not only the complaining and distrusting people in Exodus, but also the narrow-minded condemning and non-inclusive Pharisees of Jesus' day in so many ways. But here is the Gospel, here is the startling Good News: God's grace is available to all. His grace is available to the immoral and the amoral, to the Arab and the Jew, to the native and to the illegal immigrant, to gay and straight to black and brown and yellow and white. That is the good news we are to hear to take into our hearts and to live. That is the living water which must nourish us spiritually.

Rev. Randall D. Bell relates a story about a pastor who stood in court beside a member of his congregation, an individual who had been “out with the boys,” and had too much to drink. As he was driving home on the rain-soaked streets and through dense fog, he turned a corner and heard a sickening clash of metal and breaking glass. Two young people lay dead. They had been thrown from their motorcycle. He was charged with manslaughter and driving under the influence. He sat in court trembling after days of testimony. The judge was about to speak. It could mean years of prison, loss of job, and poverty for his family. The judge spoke: “The test for drunkenness had not been properly done; the motorcycle had no proper lights; the jury was ordered to render a not guilty verdict. All that was ominous and foreboding was now gone. He was a free man. The court declared him “not guilty.” His family kissed him; they could go on with their life, all because he had been declared innocent.

Pastor Bell adds these words: “Now maybe this story and the way it ended angers you, because you hurt over those young people who were killed. But know this; you and I are that man. His story is our story. We are the sinner who finds himself/herself in the presence of God the Eternal Judge.”

We, too, are in a true sense the Samaritan woman in need of that living water only Jesus can give us. And remember how the story ends? Then, leaving her water jar, the woman goes back to the town and says to the people, “Come see a man who

told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" And the Gospel of John tells us that the people came out of the town and made their way toward Jesus. And John concludes his account this way: Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

The Samaritan woman received the water that gave her spiritual life and she, in turn, was the instrument for others to receive this living water from the Savior. Each one of us, too, must pray: "Lord give me this water so I may go and do the same." **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**