

Dear friends, grace to you and peace from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I have good news and bad news as I begin: when I was preparing for today, I timed myself and found that my sermon was a little short. My husband thought that was just fine. But life happens, the world happens, and since I've never been one to leave well enough alone my sermon grew a little. Good news and bad news: I'll let you decide which is which as we pause and reflect on this third Sunday in Lent.

"Stay thirsty, my friends." Maybe you remember this tagline from a TV commercial for Dos Equis. Who could ignore the advice of the most interesting man in the world?

Thirst is something everyone has experienced at one time or another. For those of us with unlimited access to clean and safe water, thirst is a temporary thing, quickly satisfied with a swig from a water bottle. And what is it with water bottles? They keep getting bigger and more expensive. Speaking as someone who has drunk from a garden hose I'm afraid I don't get the appeal. Unless I can put stickers on it, but that's a different story.

Today's scripture readings show us that no matter what, God is good for a drink of actual water. We heard in the first reading that as Moses was leading his people out of Egypt they were close to death for lack of water. God came through with life-saving water when he directed Moses to strike the rock with his staff. The second reading also describes how water, this time as an analogy for spiritual fulfillment and transformation, is freely given.

In that second scripture reading, we heard that Jesus was traveling with his disciples through Samaria. But what was he doing traveling through Samaria anyway? Historically, Jews and Samaritans avoided each other due to deep divisions and animosity between them, and it would have been customary to take a longer route to go around that region. But for Jesus, going through Samaria was no accident, it was a deliberate choice. He faced those deep divisions and animosity by traveling straight into enemy territory with a mission: he needed a drink of water, and it *had* to happen here. Because here is where He met the woman at the well.

The woman at the well: just an ordinary woman going about her business, taking care of her daily tasks. But not just an ordinary woman at all: a woman with life experiences that had set her apart even before she gathered up her buckets on that particular day. A woman who was willing and able to hear and understand. Eventually willing to tell others what she'd heard.

Scripture tells us that this meeting happened at around noon. Noon, the hottest part of the day in a desert climate. She likely knew that her neighbors would have already come and gone in the cool of the early morning.

Regardless of the reasons for her timing, she found a tired, dusty, thirsty Jesus at the well. He surprised her by not treating her as an enemy. He also surprised her by knowing her somewhat checkered past, even though she hadn't shared it. Jesus already knew that this woman had had five husbands, and her current partner was not husband number 6. Maybe her life circumstances were the reason for her choosing to visit the well during non-peak hours, when she expected to be alone. No whispers, no pointing fingers. Just a thirsty guy who didn't really belong here at all.

The headline for this encounter could have read: "Thirsty Man Asks for Water at Well." Not exactly a front page story. But, once layers start to build they paint a much more detailed picture: First, there's the fact that Jesus chose *this* route and *this* woman in a deliberate act of social and racial reconciliation. Consider the boundaries that he stretched just by showing up here in Samaria and speaking cordially to her. Next, he proved himself both God and man in his conversation with her—he knew her background without being told, leading her to call him a prophet. True God, yet at the same time true man. A tired, and thirsty man who just needed to wet his whistle after a long day on the road, while at the same time using the water as a metaphor for eternal life. It had to be this place. It had to be this woman. He chose her because of who she was.

I'll come back to this, but just for a minute I want you to think about a question, since questions make up our Lent theme. Don't worry, this isn't a sharing activity, it's just something to ponder privately. I want you to ask yourself silently, "Who am I?" Take a minute.

Now that you've had a chance to answer that question, here's the follow up: did your answer speak to who you are, or what you do? For example, if I were to answer the question "who am I?" perhaps I would say my name, I would say that I'm a mom, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a teacher, pianist, singer, crochet-er, cook, baker. But those descriptors, even though they're true, aren't who I AM. They describe my relationships to others, and they describe what I do. Who we ARE and what we DO are not the same thing, and relationships can be fluid. True, some of the things we do are related to who we are, but they are not interchangeable. Who we are at our core is the fundamental blueprint designed by our Creator, full of potential and promise.

If we define ourselves only in terms of our relationships to others, how do we find our authentic selves? My parents have passed away, am I still a daughter? My crash seven years ago ended my career, am I still a teacher? If I'm not a teacher, what am I? When we discover who we ARE we open ourselves to greater connection to others and to God. In the course of my spiritual journey I have come to answer that question, who am I, in a different way, with more verbs.

I am a being. Not just a being, but a BE-ing. I am growing. I am learning. I am becoming. I am worthy. I am enough. I am not broken. I AM thirsty.

I try to journal every day, and for Lent I have landed on 4 essential questions as journal prompts. Essential questions go back to my experience as a teacher, designed to get to the heart of the content and determine what really matters; what is at the very root. Even though I frequently write responses to these questions, they do change somewhat depending on my frame of mind at the time—what I'm bringing to the experience. My personal essential questions are:

- Who am I?
- Who do I want to be?
- How do I want to live?
- What do I have to do to make that happen?

I've already shared my Who Am I question and response, but who do I want to be? This question encourages me to look deeper, and examine the plan that God has in mind for me and help me discern His will from my own. Who do I want to be? I want to be authentic. I want to be spirit filled. I want to be bold in my faith and have the confidence to live that faith out loud.

The lines definitely blur among the 4 questions at times, when I'm honest with myself. The third question is *How do I want to live?* I want to live in harmony with my divine creator. I want to live in connection to all of creation. I want to live in such a way that my hands and my feet and my voice are ready and willing to serve.

And finally, *What do I have to do to make that happen?* Here's the hard one. In my journal, it's easy to write down the action list: I will listen more, I will volunteer more, I will speak up more...but saying it and doing it aren't the same thing. When I write those tasks in my journal I have to be willing to change my behavior. To discern the difference between my will and God's plan for me. To say yes at the right times. To say no when necessary. In order to be transformed, to be made new, I have to admit that I'm thirsty. I have to say yes to the living water that Jesus offered that Samaritan woman at the well.

So let's go back to that woman at the well. A Samaritan, who would have commonly been considered an enemy to a Jew passing through. A lady who's been through some stuff, if she's had five husbands plus a live-in partner. Who would rather get her household water supply at high noon in the desert heat than visit the well in the cool dawn with the other women in her community. A woman who is thirsty. A woman singled out by Jesus in that moment because of who she was rather than because of anything she might have done. A woman ready to hear, ready to be transformed, ready to drink deeply of the living water that satisfies and never runs dry.

Have you ever been really, really thirsty? So thirsty it hurts? Then when you finally get a drink of water, the relief is so complete that you almost forget what it felt like to be so thirsty. Same for

hunger. Maybe sitting in a quiet lecture hall in the hour before lunch in agony because you're afraid your stomach will growl loudly enough for others to hear. That...happened to a friend once. Lunch brings relief from the agony as well as renewed energy to continue the rest of the day. Or maybe you're restless and trapped in the back seat of a car, or worse yet in a seat on a Spirit Airlines flight and you can't get up and move around to relieve that restlessness...again, my...friend experienced this. Relief seems so distant because in that moment you're consumed by the urgent need to get up and move around but you're confined to a ridiculously small space. Until the plane lands and you can get up out of your cramped seat and take a few steps. Miserably intense restlessness disappears, and relief floods through your body just from the simple act of standing up and walking off the aircraft. Side note: In the future, my...friend... will be sure to pack her prescription for restless leg syndrome in her carry on luggage.

Water when you're so thirsty it hurts. Food when your stomach is growling. Movement when you can't bear to sit still another moment. Grace and unconditional love when your heart is broken and your soul is hurting.

How many of us are struggling with something, suffering from something right in this moment? How many of us need relief from that struggle so badly it hurts? How many of us need to really hone in on who we ARE in order to prepare ourselves for the gift of salvation that only God can provide? To take in the living water that will bubble up and bring newness and life?

Who we *are*, not what we *do*. Like Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we still live in a world of conflict and animosity. My prayer is that instead of embracing the chaos we can be like Jesus and face it with compassion and a message of hope and peace. That we can live boldly as who we really are: people of faith and light. That we can recognize Christ in the faces around us and see others for *who they are*: Beloved children of God, created in His image.

This season of Lent is all about questions. Just like Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, we need to ask questions and be willing to accept answers. Who am I? Who do I want to be? How do I want to live? And what do I need to do to make that happen?

I encourage you to take the moment of reflection after the bell tone to be honest with yourself as you revisit the first question: who am I? If you get stuck, start with this: I am forgiven. I am loved. I am free.

Stay thirsty, my friends. Amen.