

“Living Water”

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This morning, like you, I went through my daily routine to get ready. My alarm went off, and I took a drink of water from my Montreat cup sitting on my bedside table. I climbed out of bed, took a shower, and brushed my teeth. I stumbled downstairs to the nearest source of coffee and proceeded to make my breakfast. I fed the cat, and after breakfast, I went back upstairs and brushed my teeth again. I got into my car and turned on my wipers to clean the dew off my windshield.

I drove through the Dunkin Donuts for my second cup of coffee. I drove in and headed to my office to print things and organize everything to get ready for Sunday. I washed my hands and headed to Rec Hall to get ready for our Summer Enrichment program. Rachel and I poured river water into pitchers for our demonstration, and I poured myself a third cup of coffee (decaf this time) and taught the class. From there, I headed to the restroom to get ready for worship, and here we are now.

You might be wondering why I took you through my rather mundane Sunday morning routine. I wanted to illustrate to you that without much thought over the course of this brief morning, I used water approximately 16 times. Granted, most Sundays, we aren't filling pitchers with water for Sunday School and worship, but the routine is roughly the same every week. I'm guessing while I gave you this description, most, if not all, of you were not thinking about the amount of water I use. For that matter, we all move through our days without thinking about our water, because it is always there. With the exception of a water main break or something similar, we turn the faucet every day and water faithfully comes out. We don't think about where it came from or how it was treated before it got there. We use water for hydration, baths, recreation, beauty, commerce, transportation, and power, just to name a few. We take it for granted until it's not there.

On September 21, 1989, I was an awkward 9th grader camped in front of the TV tracking the path of Hurricane Hugo. I lived in Goose Creek, SC at the time, just 10 minutes inland from Charleston, SC. Most of you who lived here in Concord or Charlotte at the time probably have your own Hugo stories to tell. By the time the storm was upgraded to a Category 4 storm, it was too late to leave town. So we prepped the windows and moved our bedding into the hallway of our home with a battery operated radio. Most of the trees in our yard had been taken out by other storms, so our home fared well during the storm minus some roof damage. I remember there were T-shirts printed after the storm that said “I survived Hurricane Hugo. It's the aftermath that's killing me.” There were pictures on the shirts of post-storm hardships like cold showers, rotting food, and the sounds of chainsaws running all day, every day starting at 6am.

We were lucky enough to have running water, but it was not safe for drinking. Because our water reservoir had so many downed pine trees, all the water coming out of our faucets smelled



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like PineSol for weeks. We obviously could not drink it, but we were allowed to take sponge baths with it. So we lived with cold sponge baths by candle light that left a sticky sap residue on our skin. Drinking water was extremely difficult to come by, and there were corrupt opportunists driving truckloads of water into Charleston and charging \$10 a gallon to storm survivors.

It was difficult to have so much flooding downtown and sappy water in our faucets, and yet none of it to drink. After about 4 days of suffering, my mother and I rode to northern Virginia with some friends who had family in the same area as ours. We stopped half way at a run down Howard Johnson motel, and I'm telling you, I've never taken a better shower or had a better meal in MY LIFE. That was my first life lesson about taking water for granted.

We all have stories about how we were reminded of the infinite value of water in our daily lives whether it was a storm, a burst pipe or construction. But it is rare that we stop to consider how much we take it for granted. Today, we continue our summer series based on the book "Grounded" by Diana Butler Bass. The book's primary focus is about a spiritual revolution being birthed by rediscovering God's presence in these basic elements required for living. This week's chapter explores water – our physical, spiritual, and neurological interactions with water, and where we perceive God's presence therein. Our scripture this morning engages Living Water as it is defined in Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well. I invite you to hear God's word about water in John 4:5-26. Listen now for the word of the Lord.

⁵So [Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This concept of Living Water is a great mystery to all of us. To our modern ears, it strikes us as one of those spiritual, metaphorical sayings of Jesus that will only really make sense on the other side of heaven. To even attempt to wrap our minds around what it might mean, we need to dig beyond the superficial presentation of this story and unpack the hidden meaning in the details.

To start, Jesus and his disciples were taking a short cut to Galilee from Judea through Samaria. If you've ever spent time with the story of the Good Samaritan, you are probably aware of the deep divisions between the Jews and the Samaritans. And our text this morning politely says they do not share things in common, but the divisiveness ran much deeper than that. They were not in friendly territory.

It was lunch time, and the disciples went looking for takeout somewhere while Jesus decided to take a seat at the well. It is important to note how vulnerable Jesus was in this scene. He was tired, hungry, and thirsty, and he had no friends in this town. The Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water, and at the start, we know there are at least three strikes against her. First, she was a woman which meant she had no value other than childbearing and chores in this ancient society. Second, she was a Samaritan. Third, she was clearly an outsider, even among her own people. We know this because she was drawing water at noontime by herself which would have been unusual. From what we know about ancient customs, the women would have drawn water in the morning and again later in the day, and they would have done it in groups for safety and social reasons. The fact she came alone at noon suggests that she has been cast out from her own people. We also get some additional clues later in this story about her troubled marital history.

What comes next is a fascinating exchange between Jesus and this woman. Jesus asked for water which again reminds us of Jesus' vulnerability. We know that any human, even Jesus, needs water to live. In fact, our survival is far more dependent on water than it is on food or anything else.

A few years ago, I heard a speaker share an interesting study on the brain and the limbic system. The study he was citing put participants in a room with no access to food or water. In the 23rd hour, a glass of water and a large sum of money was placed on the table in front of them. If they could resist the water for one more hour, they could leave with the money. Most participants were unable to hold out that extra hour to win the money. Their limbic system overrode any material desires they had, and they had to drink the water.

This illustrates what is really at stake in this story. Jesus was far more dependent on this third-tier outsider for his survival than he was on his own disciples. They were off getting food. But Jesus didn't need food, at least not yet. The Samaritan woman had what Jesus really needed to live. And incidentally, Jesus had what this woman really needed to live. He offered her Living Water, that this woman, this Samaritan, this outsider of outsiders, would never thirst again. What does it mean to say that fully human, fully divine Christ Jesus needed the Samaritan woman and that the Samaritan woman needed him? What does this say about our relationship with Christ? When we read this story, we are tempted to separate the physical and the metaphorical spiritual water but in reality, they are one and the same. There is an interdependency at play. It was the mutual acts of love and mercy on the part of Jesus and the

Samaritan woman that transcended all of the things that divided them. And that, my friends, is what transforms ordinary water into Living Water.

Hopefully, you have had a chance to pick up a copy of Diana Butler Bass' book, "Grounded," and you are reading along with us. If not, we will give you plenty of context and opportunities to catch up. As I mentioned earlier, this week's reading is about water, and she engages this theme by exploring the physical, spiritual, and neurological benefits of water. I was relieved to learn that 70% of my body is really just water weight. I won't tell you how many pounds that is, but it is good to know all the same. The next time your doctor gives you a hard time about your weight, you tell him or her it is Living Water. Bass also talked about how dependent all of creation is on water, and how life gravitates to the water. Spend any time near water, and you know that bugs, plants and animals are in plentiful supply near water sources. In fact, we are all drawn to water. Many of us will be heading to bodies of water for our vacations and recreation time this summer. If you ask people where their happy place is, many of them will tell you the beach or the lake. It is no accident that our most premium real estate is located with a view of the water. We are primally drawn to the water, because water is life and life comes from God.

We talked this morning in Rec Hall about the abundance of biblical stories involving water – from the flood of Noah to the parting of the Red Sea to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. Water both takes life and gives life in scripture. In the waters of Baptism, sin is conquered, and new life is given. St. Augustine said that the sacraments are a visible sign of an invisible grace. This physical, literal water and spiritual water are one and the same when put to sacred use. And as we are learning this morning, perhaps all water use is sacred use.

Bass shared in her book how only three-tenths of a percent (0.3%) of all water on Earth is drinkable and easily accessible, and how that small amount of water is in danger due to drought, pollution, and climate change. Stories about contamination and shortages from places like Flint, Michigan, California, and South Africa are in our news every day. Oil spills, drought, trash, and industrial run-off endanger our drinking supplies everywhere and therefore, endangers life on Earth every single day. Bass says, "From the humble oyster and low reservoirs to islands of floating trash and global terrorism, the future of water is the human future. And it may well be the future of God too."¹ What we learn from Jesus, the Samaritan woman, and Bass is that we cannot separate the physical and spiritual realities of water. We cannot praise God for Living Water on Sunday and take for granted and abuse our water sources on Monday. Last week, in our discussion on Dirt, Rachel posed a question about seeing dirt as God. One of our participants suggested that perhaps seeing dirt as God would change the way we treated the dirt. And I think the same holds true for water.

Back in February, our mission team that went to Haiti had the opportunity to hike up to the primary watershed that sourced the water to the residents of Bayonnais. Along the hike, we walked next to and sometimes on top of the system of aqueducts that brought the water down from the water source located at the top of the mountain. We ran into many neighbors who were washing dishes and their laundry in the water. They were often washing themselves as well.

¹ Bass, Diana Butler. "Water." *Grounded: Finding God in the World A Spiritual Revolution*, HarperOne, 2015, pp. 87.

The livestock wandered freely in the aqueducts, so we quickly realized this water was not safe to drink. Across our two trips to Haiti, we learned that our local Rotary chapters, in Charlotte and in Concord, helped bring filtration systems to the main campus of OFCB ministries as well as the medical clinic. We watched daily as children brought their buckets and gathered at these sources of Living Water which would bring life to their families. In the same way, our hosts were sensitive to our own needs for Living Water, so they took precautions in the kitchen preparing our food as well as providing as much bottled water as we needed to stay healthy and hydrated during our stay. The Haitians and the Americans were co-creators and co-receivers of this Living Water. Ancient mystic Hildegard of Bingen once said, “Rivers of living water are to be poured out over the whole world, to ensure that people...can be restored to wholeness.”²

Brothers and Sisters, Living Water is not magical water. It does not have metaphysical properties. It is ordinary water used in extraordinary ways. In the words of our wise VBS participant that I mentioned in my Children’s Sermon, Living Water is water that everyone can drink. When we see God in this Living Water, we are drawn to become stewards and caretakers of our Earth’s precious and dwindling water supply. Thanks be to God for this Living Water that gives us life and extends life to all of creation. AMEN

² Bass, Diana Butler. “Water.” *Grounded: Finding God in the World A Spiritual Revolution*, HarperOne, 2015, pp. 91.