

Third Sunday in Lent
March 23 & 24, 2019

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"Living Water"

In January of this year, a Federal Judge in Arizona handed down a conviction to four women who had been arrested in August of 2017 for entering the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge without a permit, driving a vehicle off designated roads and abandoning property there. This violated Federal Law and in addition, the Judge quoted: "erodes a National decision to maintain the Refuge in its pristine nature."

These women did exactly that....during one of the hottest summers in history, they drove a truck off the main roads and abandoned property of 1 gallon water jugs and cans of beans to feed and help the migrants entering the Sonoran Desert that runs along 56 miles of the Mexican-American border. They were part of a group called "No More Deaths" - volunteers understanding that many bodies had been found in this Desert. Their spokesperson, Catherine Gaffney said: "If giving water to someone who thirsts is illegal, what humanity is left in the law of the country?"

On March 2 of this year, these four women were sentenced - not to Federal Prison, which was possible, but to 15 months probation and fines of \$250 each.

The essential need of water for life is well known...in fact, this week I heard at a conference that it is the *most* essential need in our world today. It was for the Hebrews in our first reading - now it might seem as if they preferred slavery to freedom as they cried out: "*Did you bring us out of Egypt just to die here of thirst?*" But these poor people were so dehydrated, they couldn't think clearly. Were they ungrateful to a God who took them out of slavery? NO - they were afraid of dying!

For these Hebrews and for the generations to come, the references to water were always a symbol of God's Presence to them. They had escaped *through* water, while the Egyptians had died chasing them into it. So - had God left them??? Would they die??? Moses is directed where to find water - to show them: Not to be Afraid! They were not alone!

Fast forward to the Samaritan Woman, coming to get water. So much effort went into getting water, the walk to the well - lowering the bucket to fill it - carrying it home - how many trips a day and how far was the well? This is still part of peoples' lives today in many areas of the world. Turning on a faucet doesn't give us much of their reality.

This woman encounters Jesus - let's look more carefully at the scene. She recognizes a Jewish man and automatically sets up her defenses as she approaches the well. However, he smiles and asks her for a drink! She is totally taken aback. Instead of the usual disparaging remark, he looks at her as a human being and respectfully asked her for a drink of water. Hurt too many times to be fooled by his innocence, she challenges him with facts well known..."*How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink?*"

Jesus, not changing his face or voice, says: *"If only you recognized the gift of God and who is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him instead and he would have given you 'Living Water.'"*

Imagine the woman's mind...*Living Water*... what is that? She can only react out of her perceptions and notices he doesn't even have a bucket to get any kind of water! *"Where do you expect to get this 'Living Water'?"* She goes on to show she is well versed in her religion and his....there are definite differences!

"Well, yes, drink this water," Jesus says, pointing to the well, *"and you will thirst again. But those who drink my water - well, it is like a fountain within them, springing up to eternal life."*

Still befuddled, she says, *"Give me this water and I won't have to come here again."* So the conversation turns to the immediate circumstances of her life. (Who knows what her life had been life - given the fact that women and children were considered property - at least until the boys reached a certain age.) So the woman deflects the conversation by calling Jesus a prophet and challenges him to deny the importance of the mountain her people call sacred - while his people proclaim Jerusalem as the holy place. These are facts neither of them can deny.

Let's slow it down a bit...picture their faces together... If you can, try to picture the way Jesus is looking at her - accepting her as she is. He isn't about condemnation, but about Liberation! He sees all the good in her - her sharp mind, her fearless loyalty to her faith - And - that she is showing signs of trust in him. She feels all that - no one ever looked at her like that before.

Think for a moment how that would feel - Jesus looking at you like that - seeing all the good - the efforts you make - understanding why there might be weakness and loving even that!

This woman, like all of us - thirsts for more than just water - we thirst for a deeper faith - wanting to be loved and accepted. We thirst for life beyond what we know now - beyond the divisions, the harassment, the injustice, the negativity and the fear that all that generates!

Jesus gets that from her. For a moment, be the woman and look into those eyes - as he explains to you that the worship of God is not about mountains nor cities: *"The time is coming when real worshippers will worship God in Spirit and Truth - this is what God wants because God IS Spirit!"*

Staring at him, she finally says, *"I know the Messiah is coming, the Anointed One who will tell us everything!"* A moment's pause... and to her new freedom, Jesus smiles and claims:

"I am That One!"

What was the next moment like for her? We know she believed him because she immediately went to call others. But let's go back to the *Living Water* that Jesus promised. Water is needed...but what is needed more is *Living Water*. As the woman questioned where it was - we know she found it! Did you???

It came through Jesus' eyes! It wasn't WHAT Jesus saw, but HOW Jesus saw! She felt that from him and understood... and that led her to the *Living Water* of Faith! The *Living Water* of our

Faith means: We SEE as Jesus SEES! The Presence of God IN us can open our hearts to this grace and you will know when it is happening in you!

We need to ask for the grace each day to strengthen our relationship with Jesus, for this is essential if we are ever to be more than just good human beings...focused only on life here and now.

First: let's look at these issues:

Water - today has taken on a huge importance in areas all over the world. This has led to studies and discussions on Climate Change. So we thirst for enough water to sustain life on our planet, clean water - in our lakes, rivers and oceans.

Food distribution is a major issue for so many people do not have enough to eat...here and in every country, there IS hunger.

Medicine is needed in countries where disease is rampant - medicine is also needed in homes with limited income.

Inequality of persons exists in so many forms! Emigrants to other countries are faced with hostility - and just last week, people were killed in prayer! We know that hostility exists here when a planned attack against a Muslim village near Binghamton was in process by some boys from Rochester.

Our Southern border isn't the only place we thirst for justice. We have many places in this country where people are desperate and in real need. But the Greatest Need in our country right now is:

For Respect and Acceptance!

That is where the *Living Water* comes to life in us! It is a mixture of Compassion and Rage - and calls us to respond. The four women in Arizona felt the *Living Water* and went to leave water and beans so others might survive. Yet people supplying food banks or transporting people to them are acting out of that same compassion and rage - People deserve to have food! People deserve to have decent living situations. People deserve education and jobs! Whenever we see injustice or need and respond out of that knowledge, we are in the Flow of that *Living Water*. That is God's Presence! That Flow is Hope! Fear is an emotion that can cripple us, but Hope comes from our mind and our experience! The call we are focusing on this lent - BE NOT AFRAID - is one of HOPE!

As parishioners of All Saints - we are part of a community that relates to Jesus with a holistic vision that knows we are ALL brothers and sisters. The Water that gushed from Jesus' side on the Cross is the *Living Water* within us - embracing us with the courage and faith to worship in spirit and Truth. This is the Liberation that the Samaritan woman felt and it is the same Liberation we are called to feel and to make real in the Deserts and at the Wells of our time. That is our mission - to answer the question of those today, dying of thirst:

Is our God in our midst or not?

What will our answer be?