



Lent 3, Year A – March 27, 2011

John 4. 5-42

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

Water from a stone in the middle of the desert – a miracle of sustenance in the midst of desolation; a gift from God as a sign to the people of the Exodus. Pick up a stick and jam it into the wall of stone before you and out shall pour the water of life.

There's a story that tells about the truth of this image. When in the Sinai desert a few years ago at an oasis that consisted of a palm tree and a puddle, our Bedouin guide lifted his walking stick and jammed it into the rock – and out flowed water. We gasped. We were in awe. The explanation of those events is rather simple – a layer of granite on the bottom with porous sand stone on the top which holds onto water for a very long time. It is about knowing the right spot, the right technique and you too could make water flow in the middle of the desert.

Does knowing this make it any less miraculous? Does having seen this "miracle of Moses" re-enacted take away any of the awe and wonder of the story? Not for me. For me I am even more in love with God's great creation, God's great creation that allows for there to be water for the wanderers in the desert. I am even more in love with God's great abundant love that would share the secrets of the world with a desperate people who were complaining and turning away from their creator. It is precisely because mine eyes have beheld this glory of this extraordinarily generous God that the miracle of water so astounds me.

The New Testament stories of Jesus are all framed in such a way that this amazing, tried-and-true, reliable generosity of God is seen in all Jesus' activities and in the way Jesus lived and died. In today's gospel reading from John 4, the conversation between Jesus and the nameless woman at the well is an artful picture of this basic claim: only God – and for us, therefore, only Jesus, his Son – provides the stuff of life. The God who speaks to this woman of Samaria at the well in the heat of the day, is the God who turned the wild, barren desert into livable land for our dusty ancestors' journey, with manna from heaven to eat and water from rocks to drink.

Give me a drink, Jesus says to the woman at the well. The woman, surely used to be spoken to in such a manner, responds sarcastically and, may be, even flirtatiously. This guy's new – not one of the regulars at the well, someone who doesn't know her reputation as a Samaritan woman. I will give you living water, he says. Living water. Water through which life is given, through which all blessings flow. Water, through which the Israelites were saved from slavery in Egypt and from dehydration in the desert. Water, through which all are cleansed and reborn anew including Jesus our saviour in the river Jordan. Amen for water, amen.

She gets it, this Samaritan woman, this woman from the edges, this woman from the margins. Last week Mr. Smarty pants Nicodemus, a leader of the Jewish community, remains obtuse and unable to hear the new life that Jesus is offering. But here, on this site of daily work and toil, beside a well in the heat of day, this woman, surely tossed aside by those who professed to love her, gets it. She understands that what this man named Jesus is offering is so much more than the water she can bring up in her bucket. The contrasts between these two Gospel readings are reflective of the choices that we have during Lent, and in fact, throughout our lives. Are you ready to hear what Jesus has to offer or will you remain closed to hearing the word of God speaking to you as Nicodemus did? Or will you, like the woman at the well, go a step further and spread the Good News of

living water with those you meet? We all have a choice to make and it's clear that we are called to publicly give thanks for all of the gifts that we receive from God.

And for the gift of God's abundant creation, for God's unwavering love even in midst of desolation and for the gift of living water, thanks be to God.

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