

Third Sunday in Lent

Sermon 112

March 19, 2017

The Rev. Deacon Steve Darby

Trinity Episcopal Church

Exodus 17: 1 – 7

Psalm 95: 1 – 11

Romans 5: 1 – 11

John 4: 5 – 42

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

From the Ninth Chapter Sixth verse of Nehemiah: “You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.”

Let’s think about those things “seen” and “unseen” .....

During the late Eighties, Regina and I had had taken up a new hobby: scuba diving. The area chosen for my check-out dive was off of Windley Key, Florida. The first dives went without a hitch. A little frightening but also amazing. For me, sitting on the bottom of the ocean was akin to landing on the Moon for the first time. Mysterious and awesome.

The final dive of the trip presented its’ own complications and trepidations. Off the Florida coast, there had been eco disasters in the making for some time. The coral reefs, home to fish of every size and description, were in decay. A good deal of the deterioration was due to nature and the currents and shifting sands; but, man was, also, the cause of the wear and collapse of the home of the residents of the deep. Divers were chipping away sections of the reefs to take home as souvenirs. Subsequently, Florida had begun a program of establishing artificial reefs in the form of scuttled ships that had outlived their use.

The final dive was 120’ down on to a freighter that came to rest on its’ starboard side. Access was through a hole left by the explosive device set off to sink the ship. Schools of fish were teeming and moved quickly left and right in front of the divers. It was thrilling to watch them claim a new home. Down-time was brief so after 15 – 20 minutes we headed back to the surface. Later, I came to realize that our stewardship of the water does not stop with only what we may see on land but also the living world beneath the sea. We are stewards of all of God’s creation....seen and unseen.

As waters sustains the world beneath the waves, so does it sustain the earth and those who dwell on it. From today’s reading of Psalm: “For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all Gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our

Maker! For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. O that today you would listen to His voice.”

As it is today, in the times of Jesus, possessing water was the difference between life and death, for the animals as well as humans. When Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman, there are a number of subplots. Strange women did not have conversations with strange men and there was a great divide between Jews and Samaritans as to the proper place of worship (Zion at Jerusalem vs. Mount Gerazim). Jesus allusion, then, to living water was both a spiritual reference and a real life-and-death reference. It is reported that the well continues to provide clear water; its site is enclosed in a little church within a church and is still commemorated as Jacob’s well in the once Samaritan town of Nablus.

Rev. Dennis Ormseth, in his commentary, Real Water, Holy Water, states that “someone has suggested that our planet should be called ‘Water’ not ‘Earth’, because 75% of the planet’s surface is water. Furthermore, all life, from the cellular level up, is mostly water in all its transformations. Astronomical science is currently engaged in what is truly a cosmic search for the presence of water throughout the universe...as it did for Jesus and the Samaritans, water is a reality that can be counted upon to bring people together as long into the future as humans are present on the Earth. It is that essential to life.”

I had this epiphany as I was reading this account. I imagined the people, the Jews and Samaritans, those known and strangers, women and men, standing around a well, taking the first bucket drawn and passing from one to another, taking sustenance and participating in a spiritual act not unlike what we do at the altar as we, together as a community, receive bread and wine. As we eat the flesh and drink the blood, those gathered at the well had the opportunity to taste the “living water.”

The water, that sustains the fish of the sea and you and I, is also essential to other aspects of God’s creation of which we are caretakers. I would now like to share a story of India by Sacihandana Swami.

“A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on the end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master’s house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water in his master’s house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you. "Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion, he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it somewhat. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

The cracked pot and God have a certain commonality. We can plan and plant a garden so it will have the sunlight it needs or the shade it requires; and then, we can water it and tend it and still not get the results we want. And then God brings the rain that touches the precise places that we missed and "Voila"!

Regina and I were recently walking around the front yard checking out her handiwork or and God's creation. Regina exclaimed: "Will you look at this!" Brightly colored flowers had sprung up unexpectedly in an area not tended by human hands. God's watering had created stunning Purple Irises in an empty place. You know...we can direct the hose or sprinkler at the garden as best we can. But there is no denying that God's living waters from the heavens are the best.

The seeds and the water and our stewardship, in the final analysis, produces a place beyond mere colors and shapes and fragrances. We are stewards of scared places. Patricia Barret, in The Sacred Garden, suggests that the "connection with gardens, even small ones, even potted plants, can become windows to the inner life. The simple act of stopping and looking at the beauty around us can be prayer."

I know that when I sat at the bottom of the ocean and stared at the many schools of fish swimming in and out of this beaten and weary freighter that they were home and I thought "Wow"! Travelers who arrive at the well after many miles on the dry and parched desert and take that first taste of water, thought "Wow"! The

recognition that God's water and rain falls on all his creation and brings something out of nothing. "Wow". And "Wow" is a one word prayer and acknowledgement of the Creator of heaven and earth.

The following is a prayer written by Janet Morley. Let us pray.

Come to the waters, all you who are thirsty;  
children who need water free from diseases,  
women who need respite from labour and searching,  
plants that need moisture rooted near the bedrock,  
find here a living spring.

O God, may we thirst for your waters of justice,  
And learn to deny no one the water of life.

Amen