

Calvary United Methodist Church
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WELLS, WATER, AND WILLINGNESS
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Children's Message:

John 7:37-38 (CEB)

It's time for the kids to come on up. Don't leave me here stranded alone. Good morning. So, how are you guys? Good.

Well, you might have figured out we are going to talk about water today. So, first I want to read you this little verse from the Bible about when Jesus was away at a festival: On the last and most important day of the festival, he stood up and shouted, "All who are thirsty should come to me. All who believe in me should drink! As the scriptures said concerning me, rivers of living water will flow out from with him."

Doesn't that sound kind of weird? Drinking from Jesus? We have to try to figure out what this means, right? It's confusing. I think it's confusing.

What do we know about water? Can you tell me anything you know about water? (Child speaks.) That's one of the most important things: when we are thirsty we drink water, don't we? It's call dehydrated when you are all thirsty. You weren't even here at the first service, were you? Good job. Our bodies are made up of 75% water. I think that's about five slides away. (Child speaks.) Yes, most of the earth is made of water and only 3% of that is fresh water. I think we only use about 1% so we don't have much to use. We have to take care of it. (Child speaks.) You were going to say that? Boy, I've got older kids that know a lot about water. In the first service I was trying to pull teeth.

So, we see water all around us, don't we? This looks kind of like a lake and this looks kind of like a stream. Anybody here go fishing? More power to you. That takes a lot of patience, doesn't it, just to sit quietly. Not my thing. How about a swimming pool. We see water in swimming pools. More of us know about that. And this is my favorite: water skiing. I'm really good on water skis. I can't do a thing else, but I can water ski. There is a little kid doing it, yeah, he is right beside the older gentleman and the little kid has a bar so it's not a big chance of falling. The first time I went skiing I was about 7. My daddy put me on his shoulders and then he came up out of the water and I was up on his shoulders. It was the coolest ever.

Look at this though, did you know clouds are made of water? Isn't that crazy? How does the water hang up there in the air? (Children speak.) It's precipitations...condensation. Okay, so what year are you in school because I was trying to figure out when you guys would learn this water cycle in school. Second grade, ok. When I was young it was a lot later than that. (Child speaks.) Yeah, that's about five slides away too. You guys are on your game this morning, I'm

telling you. Here I thought I was going to tell you something new.

This is fog and I drove to church this morning in fog. What do you want to tell me about fog? (Child speaks.) I just weighs down and you are just driving through it. I used to live in London and sometimes in London they would say the fog was as thick as pea soup and you couldn't see the front of your car. That was back in the 30s and 40s before they cleaned things up.

So, we also see water as ice, don't we? That's kind of clear and refreshing. It's probably more refreshing when you get popsicles though, huh? A little bit of flavor in with your ice. (Child speaks.) Yeah, we are going to get to that too, steam. Well, steam is hot and the fog is not. But it does rhyme; that was a mistake. Some things happen though, right? Right.

And what about this? Ice skating. Now, how does water get frozen hard enough that you can actually ice skate on it? I don't get it. This is so different from the first service I am having shell shock up here. (Child speaks.) It does freeze, that's right. (Child speaks.) Yep, that's when the rain freezes. (Child speaks.) Yep. (Child speaks.) That's true, we could have multiple layers.

We're going to keep moving here. How about snow? You like snow? (Child speaks.) It just stays snow the whole way down in winter because it is so cold. Yeah, that's good for snow skiing, which I can do but not as well as water skiing. Water skiing is easier because you just stand up and follow the boat. This stuff you can break a leg. Yep, when it freezes on the way down sometimes we get hail. Right, rain freezes, that's true.

And here's the water cycle that you all so eloquently described earlier. It is in the water, it's in the ground, it evaporates...that means that when the sun is out it kind of gets misty and it goes up and it lives in the clouds in all these little droplets of water are in the clouds. And when those droplets of water start getting together and making friends, then it gets kind of heavy and then it rains. And if it's not too cold, it's rain. If it's cold, it's going to be snow. So the first part is evaporation, the second part when it hangs in the clouds is called condensation and then we have precipitation and you guys are go there. You've so got that.

So, why do we need water? Yep, yep, we have a lot of water in our bodies, so our bodies need water. That's called digestion and elimination, so when you go to the bathroom you are losing water and you need to refill what was eliminated. Very science oriented group we have here.

So, we do need it. You know, as a matter of fact since we are on the topic of our bodies being so much water, most of your brain is water and most of your heart is water and you need the water for the brain and the heart and the digestive system so that you can eat, digest your food and eliminate, but you guys have that all down.

So, on the top left, the green part, is farming. We need a lot of water for farming, the crops, make things grow so we can eat. And then the animals on the right are the cows. They call that animal husbandry, when we need water for animals. And then I like the lower left, the bottom one with the bathtub because that's just a dream, soaking in a big bathtub with bubbles everywhere, candles and roses. Don't we all have that, Ladies, on a regular basis? Just lolly-gagging about, just missing the bon-bons. And then in the middle picture is cooking, which is also a little unrealistic because she looks perfect and her kitchen is perfect and everything is tidy and clean and mine does not look like that. But the really important one is that man drinking water, because we need to drink water because, as you have already pointed out, your body is 75% water. That's like this bottle: it's full up to here and that's like how much water is in your body. Kind of like that. So, if you go like this, it's probably about like that much water in your body if you squeezed out all the water and left everything else where it was. That's a lot of water, which is why you need to drink,

Now, in the Bible, there is also a story about healing by water. These people hung around by a pool that was very still, the way the story goes, whether or not this actually happened this way is not so important. An angel came along and stirred the water and when the angel stirred the water then people wanted to get in because they thought they'd get healed. So that's going to come up later in the adult sermon if you are still hanging out with us.

We have already established this fact very clearly with these students, 75% of our body is water which is why we need to drink a lot and that means drink a lot as in water and not soda or all those sugary drinks, the fruit drinks. Milk is good, you need that for your bones, but you need a lot of water to be healthy.

So, we are going to talk about metaphors because metaphors are when two things have something in common, but we use different words to talk about it, so if I say: Oh, the classroom is a zoo...what does that mean? Oh, my goodness, yes. They are being very loud, yes. They are acting like animals. Okay, you made a great point: they are not actually animals, but they are kind of acting like animals. So that's what we mean with this classroom is a zoo? Describing you on a daily basis. I bet Mom and Dad just love that.

And you are my sunshine. Do you remember that song? You are my sunshine, my only sunshine...anybody ever sing that to you? Yeah, we used to sing it at our house all the time. But I hate to tell you the truth...you aren't actually sunshine. You are kids. It just means your moms and dads love you that much, you are special to them. It's a good thing to sing when you are down in the dumps.

You are a smarty pants? Sort of, yeah, but you aren't actually a pair of pants.

So, that's what a metaphor means, okay. So we are talking about a metaphor because Jesus used a lot of metaphors when he talked to people and one was that he called himself living water. Now, Jesus wasn't actually water, you know. You don't actually drink him, unless

you want to get into very sophisticated theological ideas. I don't think I'll open that up with this group just at this moment. So, what do you think he meant? (Child speaks.) Great use of a second metaphor, he is a shepherd leading his sheep. There are lots of metaphors in the Bible and we really try to hang on to them and learn what they mean we can learn a lot about Jesus.

I think it's kind of like we need water for our bodies and we also need God's love for our souls. Jesus can provide for us so that we can get to know God. So, he's not really water, but he was like water, because like the body needs water, our soul needs Jesus.

So, remember this verse or as much of it as you can: All who are thirsty should come to me and anybody forgives can drink. And when you are having a tough time all you have to do is talk to God: This is a bad day, God, I need help. I need you to fill me with your living water and help me get through this.

Okay? Thanks for coming up.

Message:

John 4:13-15 (NRSV)

So, we are going to talk about wells, water and willingness. I got intrigued by the whole idea of wells back when we talked about Hagar in the summer and there are a lot of metaphors in scripture...we already talked about water with the kids, so we are going to talk about it with its significance beginning in the Old Testament and then moving into the New Testament a little bit.

We probably take water for granted. We just turn on a tap and it's there. But that was not the case in the Old Testament because they had to use cisterns, streams and wells and in the desert places, digging those wells was absolutely essential for life. So, what was the value of wells? They served a lot of purposes just besides water. That wasn't the only things. They were a life sustaining source of water. They also provided offense in some ways against the enemy. They were used as a tool in warfare. They were social gather places and they were also places where betrothals took place. So that is an interesting combination of things that happened there.

Hagar, we know, was abandoned and sent to the desert without water and we cannot live without water so it is very interesting that Abraham and Sarai abandoned her to the desert with just a little skinful of water. God provided water for her. That was pointing her towards a source of life. How does God point you toward a source of life? How does that happen in your life? What sustains you and how do you know when God is doing that work in your life?

So, wells are a special concern in warfare, as I mentioned, because the ancients normally went to war in the summer because that is when they could take everybody's crops and eat

along the way. But there is little water in the summer. That's when there's least amount of water available. Therefore sometimes defenders would stop up their wells, fill them up with stones and cover them with dirt so that their enemies could not make use of their water. That's a great length to go to given that wells were difficult to drink and were considered in some ways a sign of wealth. And if they wanted to hand out some kind of special vengeance, then someone would stop of the wells of their enemies as well.

So, it's a social gathering place also. Travelers came by with their camels to get their camels water and to get water for themselves and young women were likely to go out together to collect water either for their home use or for the animal husbandry and of course as things go the young men figured out that this was a good time to go meet somebody at the well. So, a lot of betrothals happened at wells. The Hebrew Bible recounts several women meeting their future husbands at wells and these stories follow a similar pattern where a man often travels to a foreign land and then meets a young woman. After meeting the girl's family, then the marriage is arranged. Abraham's servant stopped at a well and met Rebecca there. We see that in Genesis 24. Jacob met Rachel at a well where she came to water her father's flock of sheep in Genesis 29. Moses also met his future wife, Sephora, at a well when she came with her sisters to water her father's flock and we can see that in Exodus 2. In addition to these three betrothals scenes, Saul met young women who were on their way to draw water while he was searching for his father's donkeys and that took place in 1 Samuel 9.

So, we see a lot going on at wells in terms of social gathering places. They are also places of divine revelation as water is life giving and it symbolizes creation and new beginning, it's also noteworthy to see that God choose water as places for revelation. Water is very important to us, even today in baptism: it is a symbol of new life and recreation.

In the Song of Songs the woman is praised as a garden fountain, a well of living water and that is in the Song of Songs 4 15. After Hagar fled for Sarai, and angel appeared to her at the well where he revealed her name, the name of her son Ismael and promised a multitude of offspring. So, besides the provision of water, it was also a revelation that she is going to give birth to Ismael and he will be the father of a great nation.

So, revelation is pretty important. It is also interesting that it happened there for Hagar since God did not speak to lots of women directly. Of course, this was an angel that spoke to her, but that tended to happen more for men. But God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, she filled her skin and she and the boy could drink.

Where are you when God opens your eyes? Do you know when that process happens? When he helps you to see what has been provided for you. When does that happen? Can you make note of it? There is a hymn that I love: Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth though has for me. Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unlock and set me free. Silently now I wait for thee. Ready, my God, thy will to see. Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit Divine.

So, let's look for the revelations that God has for us at different times and different places. Where are the wells of your life? What are the wells? What are the activities that nurture your soul? How do you protect those things or how do you practice those things that nurture your soul, because we need to get to know our souls. We have water for our bodies, we need Jesus for our souls.

We saw in Isaiah that God's people, the Israelites were dry and desolate. Their hopes were gone; their dreams were broken. Yet, this God could do for them what was unheard of: provide water and practically reforestation of decimated lands. Reforestation is very important. Kings used to do that, plant trees to establish their wealth and create safety in their areas and provide all kinds of good things. God can make rivers flow from mountaintops and cause pools to spring up in the desert. That sounds pretty remarkable, really, given the environment that we see in Biblical times. But this language of nature is to show us that God will do the impossible and his reason for doing this for the Israelites was so that world would see the evidence of what God had done for Israel and that God is the Holy One.

So, when God provides for us, we need to acknowledge that God is indeed the Holy One. What seemingly impossible thing do you need from God? Take a moment and think about what you need, what's your desire? Do you need help with a marriage, help with a job, health problems, financial problems, anxiety, depression? When we are going through these things they seem impossible, don't they? We seem burdened, weighted down, dry and desolate, but God is there. Let me tell you, God is there to bring new life and springs of water into your life. God provided for the people of Israel to meet their most basic and vital needs and God will provide for you are well.

So, now we are going to move to the New Testament where the Samaritan woman is at the well drawing water and Jesus is coming through, not necessarily on the path that is the shortest for where he needed to go. Nonetheless he is going through and needs water. Scripture says this is about the 6th hour, which may have been somewhere near noon and normally most of the young women went to the wells earlier than that, so it is interesting that this woman tried to avoid the crowds. She was embarrassed, she was ashamed, and Jesus knew her story and he told her her story, that she had had many husbands and he said: you give me water to drink, but if you have the water that I can give you, you'd never be thirsty again.

Clearly she doesn't understand this because he is speaking in a metaphor. Jesus frequently spoke in metaphors and sometimes when you read those parables you are like: What does this mean? I'm sorry, I am like: What does this mean? It's just not very direct. But let's think about water. The gift of water is free. The only condition in this passage is: if you thirst. If you thirst, I have water for you. Well, we all thirst, don't we? The bodies thirst for water and the soul thirsts for God. The soul has a thirst when it goes without God, so we want God and that living water from Jesus to feed on for our soul. Another metaphor he talks about being the bread of life, just a couple of chapters later. This is not coincidence.

So what Jesus is offering is satisfying and it is satisfying for an eternity. We do not want to have stagnant water in our life. Stagnant water is not healthy. It needs to be stirred up, like that that pool at Bethesda, John 7, that man waiting by the pool so that he can get in and get refreshed and get healed. He needs that healing. John tells us that a great number of disabled people used to lie there or sit by the pool, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, waiting for the angel to come along and stir that water. And this man could not get anyone to help him into that pool quickly enough. They had a little bit of a superstitious belief this was the knack that was needed, but that wasn't needed for this man because when Jesus came along, Jesus healed him.

So, stagnant water is not good for us. What are the stagnant areas of your life? Where is it dull? Where is it dry? Where is it lifeless? What's fallen stagnant? What are those areas? And then what can you do about that? Because God wants to bring you fresh water, but water has to move to be refreshed. God wants nothing more than to sustain you through your needs and build relationship with you. Where do you need to be refreshed? How can you get under that rock where mercy reigns; that waterfall that comes over you; the living water from the Living God and be in that flow of mercy? How can you do that? What needs to happen for you to do that?

I want to mention Harriet Tubman. Harriet Tubman was an African American woman in the 1800s who was an abolitionist and a political activist. So many slaves took such treacherous journeys to attempt to escape slave hood in the south and coming north was dangerous. It was very dangerous. So, they communicated through songs and Harriet Tubman sang Wade in the Water, Wade in the Water, to tell the escaping slaves to get in the water so the trail for the dogs would be lost. And the dogs that were coming after them for attack might be thrown off. So the water was protective, really protected, but it has become an illusion for the power of God in our lives. So we switch it a little bit and we think about Wade in the Water because God is going to stir that water, bring about something new, bring fresh water where there has been stagnant water and I want to give you a song that I hope will be an earworm and just live with you for the rest of the day, sung by a group called Sweet Honey in the Rock, Wade in the Water.

(Song)

Jesus did indeed cause that man at the Bethesda pool to be healed. Many of us have heard that story of healing power and then we are reminded of that Bible story. Howard Thurman was the dean of the chapel at Howard University. Here's what he said: For the slaves the troubled waters meant the ups and the downs, the vicissitudes of life.

Within the context of troubled waters of life there are healing waters because God is in the midst of turmoil. Invite God into the turmoil of your life, into the ups and downs, into the vicissitudes. Wade in. Let Him stir that water and bring about something new for you.

Are you willing to let God bring about this newness in stagnant places? Are you willing to place yourself in that sea of forgiveness like Charity Gail mentioned in that song as we opened the service? Are you willing to step under that protective waterfall and experience the mercy of a loving God? I invite you to find ways to do that in your life because God will be there for you and will not disappoint.