

## Jesus and Water

In the history of elements and Jesus, water is the most commonly used element. More than fire, more than air and more than earth. Water is first used at Jesus' baptism when the spirit of God, in the form of a dove landed on Jesus and God's voice was heard "this is my beloved, in whom I am well pleased."

We also know that Jesus walked on water, calmed a storm, and in his very first miracle turned water into wine. Not just any kind of wine, the "good" kind of wine that is usually served early in the event. Today's readings touch on images of water.

In the Exodus reading from the Hebrew scriptures, Moses is leading the Israelites from bondage to freedom. They have been walking a while and are rather thirsty and thus cranky. They demand water and Moses pleads with God for assistance. God instructs Moses on exactly what he should do, and upon striking the rock at Horeb, the elders being the witnesses to these things happening.

The people's thirst is quenched and Moses, remembering the complaining and mithering names the are "Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'"

This thread continues with the Psalm assigned to today, Psalm 95, which is part of the Book of Common Prayer Morning Prayer or Matins sung service. The psalmist laments "O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work."

The Psalmist is imploring God to remain with the faithful and bring them back into the fold, as it were. In all honesty, you cannot blame the Israelites, they were in servitude for generations, and when they were finally freed the conditions were worse, at times, then what they had faced while under the governor's rule. Moses was the one who had set the Israelites free, they had agreed to follow him, and so it only makes sense that he would be the one they would blame when things did not go according to plan.

And yet, with every instance when the Israelites are being cranky with Moses, and Moses implores God for help, God gives Moses a way to show what is happening, to keep the Israelites with Moses and trusting God. I suppose you could say that Israel was the first "show me" state.

In the gospel reading for today, Jesus commits several societal errors. In first century Palestine, men were permitted to engage in social discourse or conversation with women only to whom they were related by blood or marriage. Jesus sat himself at a well with no way to draw the water up and waited. As far as we know, Jesus did not have any family in Samaria. And yet he waited for someone to assist him. He must have known that it would be a woman as drawing water was typically a female task.

Not long after sitting down a woman of Samaria or a Samaritan woman comes up to draw water. Jesus demands a drink from her. He doesn't even say please, and we KNOW his mother raised him better than that! Anyway, he demands a drink and this Samaritan woman challenges him. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" She would have known the societal standards. She would have known their discourse was against the rules, and yet, despite all this, she challenges Jesus.

This then opens up a conversation between the two of them. Jesus tells her that if she only knew who he was, she would be willing to give him a drink of water. She asks where this "living water" is and where she could acquire it. She wants to be quenched and never have to draw water from a physical well again.

Once again Jesus tests her. He tells her to go get her husband, to which she replies that she has no husband. Jesus does not judge her, simply states the truth that she has had five husbands and the one she is with currently, is not her husband. She too shows no shame or embarrassment, and is astonished that Jesus knows these things about her.

And at this point the disciples return from where they went and are utterly gobsmacked at the scene unfolding before them. A Samaritan woman speaking with ease to their leader? A SAMARITAN WOMAN? Jesus is having a conversation with the Jew's longest enemies, the Samaritans? And they are not related in any way? AND YET not one of them says a thing. Given the track record of his disciples, I would have thought SOMEONE would have had something to say. And yet they don't.

The Samaritan woman leaves her water jar in order for those gathered to be able to access the well, then she returns to town to share what she has experienced. She questions if she has just chatted with the Messiah. The townspeople follow her. She is respected as a community leader in her own right, thus the townspeople listen to her and follow her lead.

And while the townspeople are heading to the well to meet this remarkable man of whom she spoke, the disciples are urging Jesus to eat something. He breaks into yet another parable of sowing what has not been reaped and reaping what someone else has sown. Jesus also mentions that what he has to eat they do not yet know about. And of course, this is taken literally, that some kindly townspeople has brought Jesus food to eat.

Then the Samaritan townspeople arrive and after engaging Jesus in conversation, they invite him to remain with them. He stays another two days and speaks with many new followers. The last part of today's gospel story ends with the townspeople stating to the woman that they believe now, not because of what she told them, but because they have had their own experience.

There are many amazing things about this passage and the Samaritan woman. She was, by societal standards, a fallen woman, who had five husbands and now was with a man to whom she was not married. And yet, she was a respected leader in her own right and knew the scriptures well enough to recognise this itinerant thirsty preacher as the messiah. When she returned to town and told what she had seen, the townspeople went to see what she was speaking about. They did it because they believed her, not because they wanted to dispel her theory. And when they had spent time with Jesus, they spoke that they believed, not only because of the unnamed woman at the well, but because they had heard for themselves.

Jesus knew he was breaking societal rules. He knew who this woman was and likely waited for her as he suspected she would engage him in conversation. Whether he knew she would challenge him is unclear, yet shows a tremendous amount of gumption on her behalf, to stand up to and challenge Jesus.

Remember Jesus was NOT about forming his own religion. He was about reforming his own religion, away from societal rules and regulations and into engagement and relationship with people, friend and stranger alike.

Jesus sought to move away from rules of separation, and into deeply felt heart connections between strangers and friends alike.

Keep in mind that there had been generations long disagreements between Samaritans and Jews. To say they distrusted and disliked one another would be an understatement. And yet, Jesus saw beyond the rules of division and into the hearts of acceptance and similarity.

Just as we have been walking through our Ecumenical Shared Ministry we are entering some intentional time of conversation, storytelling and sharing in our Workshops Monday and Tuesday. Monday is open to everyone who wishes to attend, and Tuesday is for our leadership from the Church Boards and Committees.

I've been waiting for this opportunity for more than a year. A chance to have some open conversation about hope, loss, identity, purposes and principles. Who are we as individual children of God? Who are we as the body of Christ? Who are we within our denominations? Who are we beyond these denominations?

We are the Ecumenical Shared Ministry between Fernie Knox United Church and Christ Church Anglican. We are the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada. We are both and we are neither. And at the end of the day, does it matter what we call ourselves?

As long as we remember that we are all God's beloved children, we can work the rest out. If you haven't already decided to join us tomorrow for the Workshop, please consider this your invitation. You will be most welcome. Please send me a note, email or text if you wish to join and haven't already signed up to be with us.

This is your opportunity to have your say. As Jesus saw the Samaritan woman as a fellow traveller on the road, may we also see one another as fellow travellers on the road.

Let the Church say, Amen.

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12 March 2023 - Lent 3  
Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 95, John 4:5-42