

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
September 8, 2013**

Panting for Living Water

**John 7:37-38 & Ps 42
(26, 198, 240, 754)**

Next to music, water is my favourite Biblical metaphor.

The loving presence of God is likened throughout the Scriptures to water,
in most cases flowing water,
water that gushes forth in abundance
bringing fertility and flourishing to arid lands.

Powerful metaphors link common things with valuable things.
In this case, it is one of the most common things in the world,
water,
With the most valuable thing in the world,
God's love.

Jesus is saying, quite simply but powerfully,
"I am the source of God's flowing love.
If you want to experience and share that energy directly,
live in me, drink it from me, and share it as I did.
In a trusting relationship with me,
you will become the source of rivers of the living waters of God's love."

Now John sets this teaching in an interesting context.
It's the last day of the festival of *Sukkot*, or the Booths.
This year, year 5774 in the Jewish calendar,
the festival runs from Sept 18-25.

It recalls for the people of Israel the temporary shelters
they built during their 40 years in the wilderness
following the Exodus.

All the old, familiar places and ways were gone.
To achieve freedom, dignity, and worth, they had to leave behind.
God's chosen people were in the midst of arid and barren land,
wandering in search of the promised land,
a land God had promised, flowing with milk and honey.
In that place, they were dependent on God's mercy and grace,
though they often forgot that reality in their fear and despair.

In the midst of that wilderness and their wandering,
God provided what they needed in unexpected ways –
manna from heaven and water from the rock.

Listen to the account in Exodus 17:1-7.
Note the element of rancor and rebellion throughout the story.
One way of seeing this element in the story
is to recognize that these people did not suffer in silence.
They complained loudly and persistently,
testing God's grace and
claiming their dignity and worth as God's beloved children.
God responds with water flowing from the rock that Moses struck
with the staff that he had used to part the Red Sea.

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He called the place Massah [testing] and Meribah [quarrel], because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

All of the Jewish festivals are designed to remind people
of their dependence on God for life itself.
Flowing water is a powerful metaphor for that reality in their lives.

The Hebrew Scriptures referred to in vs 38
are Ezekiel 47 and Zechariah 14,
passages from these two prophets
about flowing water from the temple in Jerusalem
that refreshes and restores the flourishing of all people.

That's the context, then, within which Jesus' audience in this passage,
a crowd of people gathered for the festival of *Sukkot*,
would have heard his words and been grasped by their truth.

God provides the loving, living water
that nourishes the whole world to flourish.

And we know that God best
when we understand him through our relationship with Jesus, the Christ.

We've begun our Bible Study conversations again.
They take place on alternating Fridays at 5:30PM.
We dialogue about what the Spirit is saying to us
through the passage that will be considered that coming Sunday, September 08, 2013
then enjoy a light supper together.
We're usually finished about 7:00PM.

I find the wisdom generated in these conversations
provocative and enlightening.

Here are some of the ideas
about the significance of water as a metaphor for God's love
that came up this past Friday.

Water is powerful energy – the stuff of life.
Water cleanses – removes the dirt and grime.
Water nourishes and helps things flourish – gardens after watering.
Water refreshes and renews – a dip in the pool on a hot day.
Water calms and comforts – a warm bath on a cold or stressful day.

Think of all these ideas as images for God's love,
for the intimate care that we experience through belief in Jesus, the Christ.

That's the richness of this short passage
we have pondered and memorized this week.
Actually, we've probably just scratched the surface of this metaphor.
Take it with you into your lives in the weeks ahead.
Watch for ways that water reminds you of the flow of God's love.
Learn more deeply how needed that love is for us,
every bit as necessary as water is in our lives.

Somewhere deep inside, in the core of our souls,
we do pant for God's love every bit as much as we pant for water.

*May the Spirit take these ponderings
and provoke in all of us
a witness of love and good deeds.*

Written by
The Rev. Dr. Brian Fraser
Minister with Brentwood Presbyterian Church, Burnaby, BC