

McCabe United Methodist Church

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John 4:3-15

“The Great Thirst Quencher”

Pastor Art Scanson

Pastor John Jewell tells the incredible true story of a young marine corporal named Joey Mora. In 1996, Joey was standing on an aircraft carrier patrolling the Iranian Sea when he fell overboard. His absence was unnoticed for 36 hours. A search and rescue mission began, but was given up after another 24 hours. After all, no one could survive in the sea without a lifejacket for 60 hours. His parents were notified that he was “missing and presumed dead.”

About 72 hours after he had fallen into the water, four Pakistani fishermen found Joey. He was treading water in his sleep, clinging to a makeshift floatation device made from his trousers. He was delirious. His tongue was dry and cracked and his throat parched. About two years later, Joey spoke with Stone Philips on NBC Dateline and told his incredible story. He said it was God who kept him struggling to survive. The most excruciating thing of all? The one thought that took over his body and pounded in his brain was “Water!” In the middle of a sea and dying of thirst.

Have you ever been thirsty? Really thirsty? For some cool, clear, water? Probably not like Joey but perhaps you have had times when you knew it was important to hydrate your body. The body requires about 3 quarts of water a day to operate efficiently. Not coffee or coke!

Now the Bible was written by people who knew about the need for water. There are parts of the Holy Land where drinking water is scarce unless you take some with you. So it is natural that the need for water would find its way into the sacred word. The Psalmist compares his own plight in a desolate world with that of a deer and he writes, “As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. . .”(42:1-2)

Jesus also knew what it is to thirst. It was his fifth word on the cross. Hanging there with the life ebbing out of him, Jesus cries, “I am thirsty.” However, in spite of his pain, in spite of his thirst, he saw his mission through to the end.

But for today, I want us to look at the story of Jesus found in John 4:3-15. It is the story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman. Read John 4:3-15. Yes, we know this story as “the woman at the well.” She had come to the community well to draw water. Jesus approaches her and asks, “Will you give me a drink?” Her response is, You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” Why? Because Jesus had stepped over the line on two counts in the culture of that day. First, she was a despised Samaritan and secondly, she was a woman. What is interesting is that neither of these mattered to Jesus. He reached out then and reaches out now to everyone. And so, Jesus says, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would give have

given you living water.”

She has no idea what Jesus is talking about, while reminding him that he has nothing to draw water and the well is deep. But she is wise enough to ask, “Where can you get this living water?” Which opens the door for Jesus to tell her, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Do you get that? Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

First, we need to see that God’s grace is available to all. Jesus says, WHOEVER drinks the water. . . And this whoever is you and me and the person anywhere on this globe - rich or poor, old or the young or disenfranchised of our world who are desperately trying to make it on their own, regardless of skin color or lifestyle. It means anyone! With Jesus, you don’t have to reach a level of spiritual excellence before you are acceptable to God.

You may be saying to yourself - but pastor, “whoever” doesn’t mean me. You don’t know what I’ve done. If you knew the real me, you would know there is no way God could accept me. My friend, the Bible says, For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in me will never die, but have everlasting life. It doesn’t say only those who are worthy or perfect. Jesus believes in you regardless of who you are or what you’ve done. That is again said this way, in Romans 5:8, “. . . While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Pastor Tyler Grant of Willmar, Minnesota tells a delightful story with which many of us might relate. One day Pastor Grant was in the mall with his three-year-old son Jacob. They walked by a clothing store, and Grant saw a suit that he had wanted for a long time. It was on sale so Grant decided to go in and try it on. Three-year-old Jacob remained sitting quietly in his cart until he saw that his father had his shoes off and a pair of suit pants on that were two sizes too big. Seizing the moment, Jacob took off running through the mall. Regardless of how he was dressed Grant knew he had to get his son. So with one hand holding up his pants and with no shoes on, he went chasing after Jacob. When Jacob saw his father coming, you know what he did. He started running faster and laughing. Grant says that Jacob wasn’t the only one laughing at him. By this time they had attracted the attention of people in the mall. And then when Pastor Grant thought things couldn’t get more embarrassing, Jacob ran into a women’s lingerie store. As he pulled Jacob away from the silk pajamas, Grant took his young son into his arms, and they both began to laugh. Pastor Grant concludes his story like this: “As we were walking back toward the suit store, I felt the Lord impress upon me that just as I was chasing my son, God had also been chasing me.” And that’s true of us all. We are part of God’s grand, “whoever.”

Another thing we need to see. God’s grace is found in Jesus Christ. “In him [is] life, and that life [is] the light [of the world] Jn 1:4. He is “the way, the truth, and the life.” Jesus is the one

who offers us living water. And He alone quenches our thirst for God.

Then when we have tasted and found it good and quenching – Our task is to take the grace of Jesus Christ to our neighbors-whoever they may be. Not forgetting that everyone is part of God’s grand “whoever.” Which sometimes is more difficult to remember than it may seem. Author Philip Yancey tells this great and powerful story that took place in South Africa after Nelson Mandela became president of that strife-torn country. Mandela changed all the rules about how one is to deal with his enemies. To put it another way, Mandela started enforcing rules established by Jesus 2,000 year ago. When Mandela emerged from prison after 27 years of incarceration to become president of his country, he shocked the world by asking his jailer to join him on the inauguration platform. Can you imagine the shock that was to the jailer? Archbishop Desmond Tutu was to become the head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was to defuse the pattern of revenge of that country.

At one hearing, a policeman named van de Broek confessed to a horrendous crime. He and some other officers shot a 18 yr. old boy, then burned the boy’s body to destroy the evidence. Incredibly, eight years later van de Broek returned to the same house and seized the boy’s father. His wife was forced to watch as policemen bound her husband on a woodpile, poured gasoline over his body, and ignited it.

The courtroom grew hushed as the elderly woman who had lost first her son and then her husband was given a chance to respond. “What do you want from Mr. van de Broek?” the judge asked. She said she wanted van de Broek to go to the place where they burned her husband’s body and gather up the dust so she could give him a decent burial. His head down, the policeman nodded agreement.

Then she added a further request, “Mr. Van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. And I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real.” (*Rumours of Another World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003)

Can it be true that sometimes those who have so little in life find it easier to practice God’s love and forgiveness than those of us who have so much? Let’s take a lesson from them or from the lady in this previous story.

God’s grace is available to all.

God’s grace is found in Jesus Christ.

Leaving us with the task of taking that grace of Jesus Christ to our neighbors—whoever they may be.

Yes, when we discover “we” are the “whoever” of God’s grace. Our celebration of that--is to share that grace with “whoever” we come in contact with as Jesus’ disciples!