

Water – Take Time to Drink from the Well

Genesis 1:1-7, Amos 5:24, John 7:37-39

July Series: Stop. Look. Savor – Lessons from Creation for the Long Haul

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First this: God created the Heavens and Earth - all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss. God spoke: "Light!" And light appeared. God saw that light was good and separated light from dark. God named the light Day, and named the dark Night. It was evening, it was morning - Day One.

God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of the waters; separate water from water!" God made sky and separated the water under sky from the water above sky. And there it was: God named sky the Heavens; It was evening, it was morning - Day Two.

God spoke: "Separate! Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into one place; Land, appear!" And there it was. God named the land Earth. God named the pooled water Ocean. God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:1-7 The Message

And God said, "I can't stand your religious meetings. I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I've had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to me? Do you know what I want? I want justice - oceans of it. I want fairness - rivers of it. That's what I want. That's all I want.

Amos 5:21 -24 The Message

(But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Vs. 21 NRSV)

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:37-39

Water. What are some of the biblical stories you can think of that have to do with water? (ask congregation for responses) One count I read was water appears 722 in the Bible.

The biblical narrative is filled, overflowing with water imagery. As we conclude our series on *Stop. Look. Savor - Lessons from Creation*, we are focusing on water and what biblical images can offer to us for our spiritual lives as we seek to be people of hope and compassion.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, water plays a central role in the unfolding story of Divine presence and power in creation and in relationship with people. Genesis 1 is a creation story, an origin story to describe what people saw around them. Priestly Source in the Hebrew puts creation in an order. A God who wants order and not chaos. *Elohim* (Hebrew word for God in P source) has concern for proper times and the hierarchical categorization of everything in the created world. The Creator, the Holy One is here depicted as distant, majestic, and Cosmic. Waters of creation are there in the first creation story in Genesis 1. Orderly creation and the Sabbath as part of the very structure of the cosmos.

Separation of light from darkness,

Separation of waters above from waters below;

Separation of water (sea) from land (earth).

Water is primal, primordial, a sign of life, different from land and yet connected in the story of creation. All creation is sacred and water is sacred. Although we know this story, we can learn more from other cultures about the sacredness of water.

The prophets use images of water as symbols of what is right and good and how it flows from God. The prophets, as those called by God to speak the truth and remind the people of their calling to covenantal actions, proclaim that the Hebrew people must care for the vulnerable, the widows, the orphans, the foreigner. This is what God wants and expects, not empty ceremonies. Do these actions of justice and peace so they can flow into people's lives, into the community, the nation, the world.

We read in Amos - *Do you know what I want? I want justice - oceans of it. I want fairness - rivers of it. Or Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* Justice should be like water that is constantly flowing and the forces of evil and violence and greed cannot damn it up.

So water is primal and source of life. Flowing water is a symbol of justice of what God desires.

Water is also part of the drama of God's redeeming love in liberation and freedom for the Hebrew people. The dramatic story of the parting of the Red Sea is a story showing God does not want people to be enslaved. God's desire is for wholeness and freedom, not oppression and suffering. It was part of oral storytelling for generations of how God made a way where there was no way for the people to escape from Egypt.

This water story of liberation can be seen through seen as we look more honestly at the history of our country. How might we reframe this narrative? What did freedom look like for enslaved people after the Civil War? And what might the story of the parting of the Red Sea and crossing the Jordan River to the Promised Land mean today as we wrestle with the

realities of systemic racism? Where are we in the story? How do we participate in making new paths into freedom and justice for and with people of color?

Water is also destructive in the Hebrew scriptures. Our culture seems to easily embrace the story of Noah's Ark for decorations in children's nurseries. However, it is a story about a flood and destruction. We have seen this week again the destructive power of water as climate change brings stronger rain storms and severe catastrophic flooding to Kentucky, West Virginia and other places. There is not simple rainbow that redeems all this suffering and destruction. We are facing this new reality and praying for help as we navigate it and offer help.

In the New Testament, water plays a central role and symbolizes life, grace, and transformation. Certainly the primary image of water in the four gospels is baptism starting with John the Baptist shouting words of warning and call to repentance, to turning around, to turn toward God's kin-dom and away from all that separates people from God. Get in the water, in the Jordan River. Jesus' baptism – a moment of his coming up out of the water, hearing a voice – You are my Beloved.

Baptism in the Presbyterian Church involves very little water! However, there is power in what it can mean for a family, for a child, a young person, an adult, in a congregation. It is a shared sacred moment about eternal belonging and identity. You are a beloved child of God. Together a church, a community, we will encourage you in your faith journey and serve the world as we seek to follow the ways of Jesus. What does baptism mean for you today?

In two passages from John, Jesus says something about the kind of water he is offering. The Gospel of John is a book of signs: concrete objects and actions that point to a deeper truth. Bread, wine, water, light, friendship, love all of which point to the way of God's kingdom and abundant life. John does NOT want us to have opinions, ideas, and information about these. John wants us to have them; to have them in all their fullness; in all their grace and truth.

Water in a well appears in Chapter 4. It's around noon. The Galilean sun is at its apex, bearing down mercilessly. No respite from the intense heat. A woman comes to a well and Jesus arrives. It was perfectly normal for this stranger Jesus to ask for a drink of water.

What is terribly abnormal about this request, though, is not what is asked but who it is asked of. Even the woman knows full well that men in her day and time, in her culture, do not talk to women, especially women they don't know. They don't just launch into a conversation with some strange woman at the local watering hole. They don't ask favors from them. The gulf, the divide between the sexes, fully pronounced in ancient Palestine.

But more than that, the even greater divide: she a Samaritan, and he a Jew! Samaritans, a race of people long before part of the Jewish nation but separated by the kingdom split. Making their home in the north where the capital of Samaria was. Seen by their Jewish

counterparts as less-than: they worshipped Yahweh, but not like we do. They read the Torah, but not the whole thing. Jews never spoke to Samaritans because they saw themselves as above them. Samaritans never spoke to Jews because.....well, why would they ever want to? The gulf, the divide between these Samaritans and Jews, fully pronounced in ancient Palestine.

Can I have a drink of water? a Jewish man asks a Samaritan woman. Jesus sees her, her authentic self. - You've had a hard lot in life, I can tell. You are thirsty – but not for this well-water. Let me tell you about the kind of water you're really thirsting for. Jesus gives it a name: living water. The Greek word: *zao*, meaning "to be alive, possessed with vitality." Running, free-flowing. Even the word itself sounds alive – *zao*!

It does not take a lot of convincing for the Samaritan woman: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty again, or have to keep coming back here to draw from this well."

John's gospel can be a challenge to read – Jesus always speaking in broad, ethereal strokes, metaphor, double meaning. But what is clear is Jesus sees her, talks with her. He's willing to throw aside all protocol, all cultural norms, and reach out to someone that society would not expect or even want him to. To cross barriers and divides for the sake of sacred connection and love. To connect. To invite her to drink deeply from the gushing, living water he provides.

In our passage from John 7, this is repeated – Jesus says – I offer living water. These stories remind us: we all need this water. We need it because only living water can quench the deeper thirst within us, within our communities, within our societies, within our world. We are thirsty, so thirsty for this kind of water.

People are thirsty for more than the endless cycle of bad news. That thirst means drinking deeply from the well living water. It is the connection to God and each other and creation. When our souls are parched, when we feel like the streams of hearts feel dried up, how do we find water again? We go to the deep well of our spiritual lives in community. Worship, music, prayer, caring for one another, serving our community, working for peace & justice, praying together, silence together, studying together. This living water is flowing here.

And there is one other kind of water that flows. In my 30+ years as a pastor, I've seen a lot of watery eyes at the table. Tears are divine gifts because they flow from God's grace; they are signs of communion in the Spirit, experiences of unconditional love and welcome and grace. We may feel teary because of belonging and gratitude and tears flow. I wonder if the water is also the tears that come with being human in this sometimes crushing world. Jesus also wept over the pain in the world.

Living Water - Waters of creation, waters of justice flowing, tears in the midst of Beloved Community, joy and sorrow. This living water is not in short supply. There is no drought. Go to the well, fill up your cup, drink it up. And then notice who joins you at the well and asks – May I have a drink? Amen.