

What Do You Thirst For?
Elizabeth Communities of Faith Lenten Series
March 9, 2016
St. John's Baptist Church
Rev. John Cleghorn
Texts: Psalm 69:1-3 19-21; John 4:13-15

Sometimes we ask the world to quench our thirst and the world just leaves us bitter. But, when we open our dry and parched throats to God, we know the promise of living waters.

Just ask the people of Flint, Michigan. For months, the mostly black, mostly poor residents of the rust belt city kept saying there was something wrong with their water. For months, public officials knew the lead-tainted water Flint residents were drinking, cooking with and bathing in was highly dangerous with lasting, serious health effects. For months, they did nothing.

The Flint water was ruining more than just human bodies. General Motors noticed the engine blocks of the Chevys and Buicks and its Flint assembly plant were rusting, so corrosive was that water from the Flint system. GM was able to switch its water source and save those engine blocks. The people of Flint weren't so fortunate, and now the lives of thousands of Flint kids have been marred and forever changed, forever limited by lead poisoning.

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For hours, Christ Jesus had hung on the cross. For hours, the process of crucifixion had done its worst. With dull nails driven through his wrists and ankles, his whipped body sagged on the cross in the hot, dry sun. Slowly, the life was leaving his body.

Perhaps, to take his mind off the agony, Christ silently recited the words of Psalm 69.

I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

Finally, Christ called aloud, "I thirst!"

The Roman soldiers had come prepared for themselves for what the day would bring. Knowing they would be posted at Christ's cross for hours, until the life had left his body, they had brought a jar of wine vinegar to quench their thirst. The soldiers called their drink of choice *posca*, a mix of vinegar wine and water preferred over just unpurified water, which often had a bad smell. The *posca* didn't make the soldiers drunk. It just wet their mouths for a moment.

In a flash of unexpected kindness, one soldier dipped a sponge in the vinegar wine and lifted it to Christ's lips. Whatever relief the sponge delivered, it was only momentary and – as with a lot of things this world delivers – it left a bitter taste in Christ's mouth.

When the human side of Christ cried out, "I thirst," the world mocked him with a sip of bitter vinegar water, something far short of the fresh water that might have been pulled up from a well. That was what the world did for the human side of Christ that day.

And what about the divine side of our Lord? What was the divine side of Christ thirsting for that day?

When he cried out, "I thirst," perhaps the divine side of Christ was speaking a last, desperate hope for the world he had come to know and to serve.

Was he thirsting for just a little more time on earth to spread the good news of the gospel to a desperate and divided people?

Was he crying out for just a few more days to tell parables, perform miracles, heal the sick and give sight to the blind?

Was he thirsting for justice to reign down like water and righteousness like an ever flowing stream?

Was he mourning how the prophecy of Jeremiah had come true, how his people "had forsaken him, the fountain of living water, and, instead, had dug out cisterns for themselves that were cracked and would hold no water at all.

Whatever the divine side of Christ thirsted for in that moment, all he got was a taste of vinegar on a sponge.

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It was just another day for the Samaritan woman who went to the well that day to draw water for the day's chores. It wasn't just any well, but the well Jacob had dug thousands of years before. Ever since, it had nurtured God's chosen people and their flocks and their herds.

No wonder the Samaritan woman was surprised when a stranger there, a Jew no less, had the gall to speak to her in public.

"Will you give me a drink?" Jesus asked her that day.

We can hear her scoff audibly at him. Who are you to ask me, a Samaritan woman? You don't even have a bucket or a cup to draw water with? Gesturing toward Jacob's ancient well,

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

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We are four weeks down the road of our Lenten journey. How is your Lenten walk going? Have you walked long enough now to know thirst? Have you focused enough on the path that you have been able to escape the daily details of your lives in order to look ahead to the cross?

As Jesus walked this path that first and only time, he reached that pivotal moment of no return, no turning back. As the gospel of Luke says in the ninth chapter, Christ “proceeded with fixed purpose towards Jerusalem ... he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

Have we set our faces toward Jerusalem? Have we declared – in our hearts and to our God – a fixed purpose?

And, if so, do we know what we truly thirst for?

Not a cup of coffee in the middle of this afternoon to keep us going back at the office, or a glass of wine at the end of the day. Not a gulp of Gatorade after a good work out at the gym. Not a swig from the garden hose as we encourage our spring plantings toward bloom. For those sources bring only temporary effect.

But the living water Christ promises sustains us in an altogether different way. The living water Christ promises will never leave us bitter. The world may continue to do its worst. It may continue to leave us dry in our thirst for living water and lasting words. It may continue to befuddle, discourage, disappoint and even dismay us. It may say to us, “Turn back. The journey just isn’t worth it.”

But Christ is always waiting at the well that never fails to sustain us. Christ waits for us to come and ask for a drink of the living water, that paradoxical living water that helps us die to ourselves and be raised anew on Easter morning. Isn’t that what this journey is all about, anyway?

Four weeks into our Lent together, we have now set our faces to Jerusalem. As we pause for a moment for one more sip of cool, living water, Christ meets us at the well with only one question:

“Friend and sojourner, weary traveler, child of God, my beloved, what do you thirst for?”

Amen.