

Exodus 17:1-7 and John 4:5-42

I recently read a story where 2 men had decided to meet for lunch at a restaurant that was located at an intersection in a town exactly half way between each of their communities. One of them arrived a little early, went to the door of the restaurant and saw the hours posted as being closed on Mondays. Since it was Monday he went back to his car and started reading the material he had brought with him while waiting for his friend to arrive. He kept looking at his watch, wondering where his friend was. 45 minutes after their meeting time his phone rang, and the caller ID said it was his friend. He answered it expecting his friend to explain why he was running so late. Instead, his friend accusingly asked him, "Where are you?" No, they hadn't gotten the meeting place confused; what neither one realized was that there was a parking lot on either side of the building that was not visible from the other side, and each of them had arrived on time and waited for the other to show up. It had seemed to both of them that the other was nowhere near where they were located.

Sometimes it seems that way with God. It certainly did with the Hebrew people when they were wandering through the desert wilderness. After they escaped from the Egyptians you'll remember they crossed the Red Sea. When Moses held out the rod God held all that water back, while they safely crossed on dry land to reach the other side. When they complained to Moses they were hungry, which is recorded in Exodus just prior to this reading we heard today, Moses went to God with their complaints and God sent them manna. When they were no longer satisfied with simple manna they again complained to Moses, Moses again went to God, and they received quail.

Now they were in the midst of the desert and there was no water. They went to Moses. And they weren't polite about it. They accused Moses of bringing them out into the desert to die of thirst. Moses was afraid for his life. He asked God what he was supposed to do. God sent him to the rock at Horeb with instructions to take the rod he had used at the Nile and strike the rock. Remember Moses held the rod over the Nile back in Egypt when he was bartering with Pharaoh for the people's release. The first plague turned all the water in Egypt to blood when Moses held the rod over the Nile. But when Moses struck the rock at Horeb with the same rod, fresh water gushed out. There was plenty of water for everyone. God was using water to save them in so many various ways. Life giving water.

Which takes us to today's Gospel reading. We physically cannot live without water, but we need spiritual water to truly survive. The Samaritan woman came to the well at noon. It was an unusual time for a woman to be at the well, usually they came in the early morning before the heat of the day. But for some reason this woman came at noon. Maybe she had something else to take care of that morning. Maybe she didn't like the way the other women gossiped. Some preachers have thought she was coming at noon because she was an outcast from the other women, but there's nothing to substantiate that claim since she was able to go into town and bring almost all of the townspeople back with her. And yes, she had had 5 husbands. There could be legitimate reasons why she had 5 husbands. She could have been widowed 5 times. The man she was with at the time wasn't her husband... maybe she was living with her brother, we don't know. Life was hard. Nevertheless, she met Jesus at the well.

He asked her for a cup of water. She confronted him; how could he, a Jew, ask a Samaritan WOMAN for a cup of water? There are two cultural taboos at play here: First, the Samaritans and Jews were enemies. Second, a man should not ask a lone woman for anything, he shouldn't

even be talking to her. Yet Jesus asks this Samaritan woman for a cup of water. He cares enough for her as a person, he sees her humanity, and he pays attention to her, he acknowledges her presence. And they begin an earnest conversation.

The woman asks Jesus about worshiping, whether it is right to worship on their mountain or in Jerusalem. The Jews at one time in their history did worship on the mountain, that was before they returned from the Babylonian exile, and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, making it the center of worship. Jesus said neither place was the correct place because God is to be worshipped in spirit.

Understanding of who Jesus is gradually begins to dawn on this woman. He has promised her living water. He has told her about her life. He said God is to be worshipped in Spirit and truth because God is Spirit. She knows there is a promised Messiah. All at once she recognizes Jesus for who he is. And she can't keep the news to herself. She runs and tells the entire town and they come to see for themselves. And they believe. Jesus and his disciples stay with them for a few days. Because Jesus promised the woman living water. Life sustaining water.

We have been given this life sustaining water too. Today we Patton Sharp will be baptized. Patton is entering into a new life sustaining relationship with Christ and becoming a member of the family of God. The water of Christ gives us a relationship with Christ, it gives us an abundant life. We find the presence of God through the waters of baptism.

And even though at times it may seem as though God is not near, God never deserts us. All glory be to God.