

Rev. Eric Moore
College UMC
March 15, 2020

Sermon Series: "Boot Camp for the Soul"
Sermon Title: "Hydrate"
Scripture: John 4: 5-42

It was about 10 years ago right around Christmastime.
I was serving the UMC on Central Methodist's campus – making that final push to meet the church budget, pay apportionments, get a malfunctioning copy machine fixed ... thinking my ministry challenges were so significant.

The phone rang – and when I answered ... my heart sank.

We were in a covenant partnership with a church in Mozambique.
It was the rainy season – and this year's rains were so bad that they washed the church away.

Several persons of the congregation perished.

In the midst of the grief and sadness and condolences and earnest desires to support, I couldn't help but privately feel the irony—

For some time now, we and countless other UMC's in Missouri had been raising funds to build water wells in places like Messica and elsewhere – safe, easily accessible water—

Water, of course, essential to life—

While at the same time, it was water (in the form of rain and flooding) that destroyed so much.

That is the problem with water.

And we aren't immune.

Parts of the US have had to ration water in time of drought. Particularly it's affected farming – and the bottom line of farmers and ultimately the rest of us at the check-out counter.

And both in the US and around the world, we've seen regions devastated by too much water – too much rain, overwhelmed by flooding.

We feel the irony—

Too much or too little are each destructive.
Our access to water is something we, by and large, take for granted.

There are many places in the world today for whom it is a precious commodity – access to water defines what property has value—

And traveling significant distances to access clean water leaves lives in precarious position – especially women and children who are vulnerable for attack as they venture far to acquire the water necessary for a family.

To cook with ... to clean the house and dishes ... wash clothes and bodies.

Water is the common denominator for us all.
It comforts and cleanses – as well as destroys by its abundance or scarcity.

We are all equally and utterly dependent upon water.

It's essential for our survival.

Water is also essential for our physical transformation.

No matter how much we diet or exercise, our efforts at physical transformation are thwarted – our bodies left compromised by a lack of essential fluid.

This Sunday of Lent, we particularly note how spiritual hydration is essential for the transformation we seek.

This story we read this morning is one of those examples of the ways Jesus drove the religious establishment of his day absolutely nuts.

He's in territory considered off-limits.
He's talking to someone he wasn't supposed to do.

It's the noontime heat – and Jesus is drawn to the well because of his thirst.

The woman (whose name we are never told) is drawn to the well surely out of her own thirst – running that errand ... the long trip to the well to collect enough water to keep her household running – and carry it home.

But she doesn't come to the well in the cool of the morning with the other women – we believe she comes in the noonday heat to avoid their stares and scorn.

We, the reader, know her shame – she's had five husbands and the one she's living with is not one of them. (It's likely that we would have derogatory terms to describe this woman in our day – but we can bet they did so in Jesus' day – her lifestyle is scandalous.)

And she's a Samaritan at that.

But Jesus doesn't treat her as she's accustomed to have been treated for God knows how long in her life.

He warmly speaks to her

He draws her out

He reveals the truth of his identity to her

And then – get this! – entrusts her with proclaiming to all of her village the good news of Jesus' arrival that reveals God's love for all people.

This encounter changes her life.

It's a power that Jesus has –

But it's not unlike any power we have in the world as Christ-followers.

Theologian, author, and preacher Frederick Buechner compares humanity to a gigantic spider web – “if you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling.”

“As we move around this world and we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility, toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-tremble.

The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life – and that in turn another – until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked. No man is an island.”

Jesus' actions of uncompromising care of the outcast – and Buechner's words about how humanity is an intricate web where how we choose to interact with each other sets the whole web trembling—

Has me thinking.

We – right in the here and now – are living in anxious times.

If we ever thought we were islands – that our lives were not woven together – we do so now with the spread throughout the world of a virus that particularly endangers the most vulnerable in our communities.

The web of interconnectedness we live in breaks down all artificial barriers of class, race, nation, gender, age, status....

We get to choose how we treat one another.

May we live as those who have been quenched by the Living Water – who would offer that Living Water for others.

So much has us understandably anxious and afraid in the midst of so much we cannot control. But, beloved, we know the One who is.

Bishop Farr: “Never forget, the role of ‘savior’ has already been filled.”

A question to ponder in your Lenten journey this week:

**As we and our neighbors find ourselves anxious and afraid—
Where do you find hope?**