

Water is a commodity we cannot live without. We're going to talk about what this meant to Moses and Israel and what it means for us in our day to day walk with the Lord.

OPENING PRAYER

READ Exodus 17:1-7

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah (test) and Meribah (quarrel), because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

"The people of Israel" were some two million in number whom Moses was leading out of Egypt after hundreds of years of slavery under the hand of Pharaoh. They were in the desert, and they were not happy, for they did not have any water.

They cried out, **"Is the Lord among us or not?"** And the Lord was angry with them for their lack of faith. Upon first glance it might seem like the Lord's anger was misplaced. After all, who wouldn't complain if God led them into the desert but failed to provide water? Indeed, water is a commodity we cannot live without. But there's more to the story.

The Lord had demonstrated His love to the people in so many unique and miraculous ways before this event in the desert. He sent plagues on the Egyptians to demonstrate His power and authority and to free Israel from bondage. And once they were free, God led Israel through the desert with a cloud by day and by fire at night. Then when Pharaoh had a change of heart and decided to go after Israel, God hid them from him under a cloud. And when they got to the Red Sea, the Lord parted it down the middle so they

could cross from one side to the other on dry ground. The Lord delivered Israel with miracle after miracle. He never abandoned them. He never told them to figure it out on their own. But He was always with them.

And this was not the first time Israel complained, nor was it their last. When Israel looked over the Red Sea before God parted it for them, they cried out, **“Is it because there on no graves in Egypt that you have brought us into the desert to die?”** (Thus began the mistaken notion that sarcasm is a spiritual gift.)

It’s even in their name. “Israel” literally means “struggles with God.” That’s the kind of people they were, always struggling, grumbling, and complaining, despite everything God had done for them.

So now we find the people in the desert without water. Their throats were parched, but their hearts were even dryer, as dry as the desert itself. And they complained, **“Is the Lord among us or not?!”**

Despite the people’s grumbling, the Lord gave them water. Later He nourished them with manna—bread from heaven—and His work among them did not cease as He protected them from all their enemies until they reached the Promised Land. In His mercy the Lord loved the people despite their lack of faith.

Entitled, spoiled brats, aren’t they! In June I was in Israel leading a tour. My Jewish guide told my group the reason God chose Israel was to prove that anyone could be saved!

But aren’t we the same way? Like Israel don’t we also forget how often God has intervened in our lives, only to complain bitterly, “Surely He’s forgotten us?!”

It is the human condition. We take for granted what we’ve been given. We’re insatiable. We can never have enough stuff!

This is why we need Jesus. Consider the story of the Samaritan woman at the well with Jesus:

READ John 4:7-15

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him,

and he would have given you living water."¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."¹³ Jesus said to her, "**Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,**¹⁴ but **WHOEVER** drinks of the water that I will give him will **NEVER be thirsty FOREVER. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**"¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

Water is a commodity we cannot live without. That is why Jesus used it to illustrate His ministry, which He said was LIVING WATER.

Like so many of Christ's teachings this one too includes a vivid picture to help us grasp a difficult idea.

For instance, if I told you that God loves you, you might be moved, or not. After all, what is love, truly?

On the other hand, if I told you God's love is like a cool glass of water you put to your parched lips after a full day's work, on a sweltering hot, cloudless day, you'll imagine a series of images which you can actually feel. Imagine that as you pull that glass to your lips and take a deep swallow of the water, you feel energy return to your body. Then imagine that you take another glass of that water—it's icy cold—and you pour it over your brow. As it runs down your face, your neck, and onto your t-shirt you truly feel revived, refreshed.

That's an illustration of Living Water, the love of Christ. Like cool, clear water pulled from the deepest well, Jesus refreshes us and restores us to life.

Jesus bathed us in this Living Water in Baptism, literally. This is the best physical representation of Living Water. For as Luther explains in the Small Catechism, Holy Baptism "is a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit" [cf. Titus 3:5-8].

But the Living Water of Jesus flows over and through us in other ways too. His forgiveness of our sins on the Cross is Living Water. His grace for us in His Supper is Living Water. The proclamation that your sins are forgiven is Living Water. The communion of His Spirit with your spirit is Living Water. Our fellowship as a community gathered in His name is Living Water. This water of our Lord satisfies the deepest thirsts we have ever known. With this water we are nourished unto eternal life.

But this Living Water, the work of Jesus in our lives, isn't just about getting to heaven. But the Lord has given us this refreshment for our souls for today.

So what do you thirst for now? What are the things that parch your spirit and heart? Does your heart ache for a love lost? Receive the Living Water of Jesus; let Him heal your heart. For He said, "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Do you crave acceptance from the people whom you love? Receive the Living Water of Jesus; receive His acceptance of you as His son, His daughter, into your heart. Are you overwhelmed by a grief which you carry in your heart day after day? Receive the Living Water of Jesus; hear Him say, I grieve with you. Receive My hand, and walk with me.

Are you filled with shame because of an experience you can't seem to shake? Receive the Living Water of Jesus. He's saying to you even now, your past is nothing to Me. I love you and I have a plan for YOUR life.

As a child I had some very oppressive experiences with my stepfather, which created in my heart a lot of fear, especially a fear of the unknown. For many years I was a very timid and withdrawn young man. For a long time the motto in our family was that us kids should not be seen or heard. And I gladly obliged. I became invisible.

But one day I read these words in my Bible: **"if the Son sets you free, you are be free indeed" (Jn 8:36)**. I'd read these words before, but now they jumped off the page at me. I realized at that moment that I had been set free from the crushing impact of the emotional abuse that I had spent so much time hiding from. They no longer had power over me for my Lord Jesus was in charge of my life. I took hold of those words as my own, and my heart was set from the malice of the people around me. I realized I was a child of God. And I had peace. This was my Living Water.

Friends in Christ, let Jesus' words wash over you, for they are indeed Living Water. You are forgiven. You are His beloved. Your heart has been wrested away from the devil, and you are free, and nothing in heaven or on earth can put you in bondage ever again.

Brothers and sisters, this week may you be filled with thankfulness for everything the Lord has given you for this life and the next.

And may you be filled with confidence that the Living Water which our Lord Jesus promised the woman at the well is for you too, taking time in your busy day to spend time nourishing your heart and spirit with His Word.

And this week may you have the courage, confidence, and opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus, our Living Water. Amen.