

Sunday, February 24, 2008
Third Sunday in Lent

INTRODUCTION

In today's gospel the Samaritan woman asks Jesus for water, an image of our thirst for God. Jesus offers living water, a sign of God's grace flowing from the waters of baptism. The early church used this gospel and those of the next two Sundays to deepen baptismal reflection during the final days of preparation before baptism at Easter. As we journey to the resurrection feast, Christ comes among us in word, bath, and meal—offering us the life-giving water of God's mercy and forgiveness.

PRAYER OF THE DAY (ELW)

Merciful God, the fountain of living water, you quench our thirst and wash away our sin. Give us this water always. Bring us to drink from the well that flows with the beauty of your truth through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

READINGS

Exodus 17:1–7

Psalm 95

Romans 5:1–11

John 4:5–42

FIRST READING: Exodus 17:1–7

Because the thirsty Israelites quarreled with Moses and put the Lord to the test, Moses cried out in desperation to the Lord. The Lord commanded Moses to strike the rock to provide water for the people. The doubt-filled question--“Is the Lord among us or not?”--received a very positive answer.

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

PSALM (ELW): Psalm 95

¹Come, let us sing ¹ to the LORD;

let us shout for joy to the rock of ¹ our salvation.

²**Let us come before God's presence ¹ with thanksgiving
and raise a loud shout to the ¹ LORD with psalms.**

³For you, LORD, ¹ are a great God,
and a great ruler a- ¹ bove all gods.

⁴**In your hand are the caverns ¹ of the earth;
the heights of the hills are ¹ also yours.**

⁵The sea is yours, ¹ for you made it,
and your hands have molded ¹ the dry land.

⁶**Come, let us worship ¹ and bow down,
let us kneel before the ¹ LORD our maker. R**

⁷For the LORD is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture and the sheep ¹ of God's hand.
Oh, that today you would ¹ hear God's voice!

⁸**Harden ¹ not your hearts,
as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah ¹ in the desert.**

⁹There your ancestors ¹ tested me,

they put me to the test, though they had¹ seen my works.
¹⁰**Forty years I loathed that generation, saying,**
'The heart of this people goes astray; they do not¹ know my ways.'
¹¹Indeed I swore¹ in my anger,
"They shall never come¹ to my rest." **R**

SECOND READING: Romans 5:1–11

Though we often hear that God helps those who help themselves, here Paul tells us that through Jesus' death God helps utterly helpless sinners. Since we who had been enemies are reconciled to God in the cross, we now live in hope for our final salvation.

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.⁹ Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

GOSPEL: John 4:5–42

Jesus defies convention to engage a Samaritan woman in conversation. Her testimony, in turn, leads many others to faith.

⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common 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 no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"¹³ 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."¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet."²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar

and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he? ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³²But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

As we journey toward the renewing waters of Easter, let us pray for the world, the church, and all who seek new life in Christ.

A brief silence.

Bring to the water of life those preparing for baptism (*especially*), and all who thirst for you, that we may bear witness to your grace and praise you forever. God of our salvation,
hear our prayer.

Pour out your Spirit and truth upon leaders of the world, that they may seek reconciliation with enemies, and execute fairness and righteousness for all people. God of our salvation,
hear our prayer.

Show the earth and all creation with living water, and renew in us your commandment to care for the land, sea, and everything that you have made. God of our salvation,
hear our prayer.

Grant the water of promise to those who thirst for basic necessities, and draw to the wellspring of healing and wholeness those who are outcast and sick (*especially*). God of our salvation,
hear our prayer.

Deepen our prayer life in this time of Lent, that with quiet minds and hearts, we may come to experience anew the love and hope flowing from your Son's wounded side. God of our salvation,
hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of living water, we commend to you all who have died in the promise of your love (*especially*). Give us faith to follow their lives of truth, endurance, and hope. God of our salvation,
hear our prayer.

Receive our prayers and grant us your mercy, O God, in the name of the crucified and risen one, Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.

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