

Scriptures

Exodus 17:1-7

17 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?"

Psalms 95

O come, let us sing to the Lord;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

For the Lord is a great God,

and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth;

the heights of the mountains are his also.

The sea is his, for he made it,

and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

O come, let us worship and bow down,

let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

He is our God,

and we are the people of his pasture,

and the sheep of his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice!

Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,

as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

when your ancestors tested me,

and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

For forty years I loathed that generation

and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray,

and they do not regard my ways."

Therefore in my anger I swore,

"They shall not enter my rest."

John 4:5-42

⁵ So 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.

⁷ A 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."

¹⁶ Jesus 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."

²⁷ Just 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, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

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

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So 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."

Sermon: Unwarranted Blessing

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

As you know, Noah, Kyoungsoo and I recently went to Korea. Noah and I got home Friday afternoon, Kyoungsoo is staying an extra week to spend a little more time with family.

While we were in Korea water was a consistent theme. We drove up the coast and stopped to put our feet in the ocean – the water was numbingly cold, but still refreshing and it felt great to be barefoot in the sand for the first time this year. We visited a large cave system filled with both flowing and dripping water, and marvelled at the work the water had done in creating the rock formations we saw.

We visited one of the largest wetlands in the world that floods at each tide and serves as a massive water filtration system.

We also visited a number of mountaintop temples, most of which had stone formations to catch the water that springs up from the rocks and makes its way down the mountainside. At the temples were also large wooden fish-shaped drums to call to the creatures of the deep.

In Korean homes the bathrooms really are bathrooms. Our bathrooms contain a bathtub; their bathrooms are the bathtub. The floor is lowered by a couple inches, the entire room is tiled and there is a drain in the floor. There is both an overhead shower and a hand shower on a hose, so when it's time to clean you can really get crazy in there, water flying everywhere without worrying about where you aim the showerhead.

In the towns and villages there were many shops with large tanks of water filled with flounder, octopus, crab, and squid, and in a sushi restaurant that we visited we had to walk through a small maze of fishtanks that contained our lunch, getting fish water on our shoes as we got ready to eat.

Being a peninsula, the Koreans are surrounded by water on three sides and water very important to them – both fresh and saltwater. Water feeds, cleans, purifies and sustains them. Water is life.

Water is also a theme in this weeks readings. We heard about Moses striking the rock at Horeb, releasing enough water to satisfy the thirst of a million Jews. The back story to this water event is that the people were grumbling. They said to Moses 'why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the desert of thirst?'

The people were complaining, but the situation was much more serious than mere bellyaching. Moses is afraid that they are about to kill him rather than follow him any longer. Of course, the people's rejection of Moses is really a rejection of God. It isn't Moses' idea to be in Rephidim; God led Moses with the pillar of fire and smoke, which all the people could plainly see. Though they vented on Moses, it was God whom they were really complaining about.

God's reaction to this revolt is revelatory. Instead of chastising and punishing, God reaffirms the hierarchy that was in place by leading Moses, who led the people to the rock at Horeb which he struck at God's command, releasing water for a million thirsty Jews.

Though the people were actively sinning, God chose to embrace them and bless them with life giving water. God revealed to them their stubbornness and ingratitude, their lack of faith and trust, then blessed them with the water they needed. It's like giving a child having a temper tantrum a hug. When a child is screaming and throwing things they certainly aren't deserving of love, but the act of hugging shows them that they are lovable despite the way they are behaving.

In this episode in the desert God revealed to the Israelites their reality, and then blessed them with living water. Hold that thought while we move on to the woman at the well. The woman at the well was also in a state of rebellion. She belonged to a people who had rejected God and had embraced other gods instead. Of these people who were far away from God, this woman in particular was living in a way that even her own people rejected.

She was at the well at noon. Water is collected in the morning for cooking and cleaning; not at lunchtime. This woman came late to avoid the other women – she was a rejected person among a rejected people. She was a sinner among sinners.

Jesus found her at the well; he approached her and made a demand of her. Give me a drink, he said. To us this doesn't seem like a big deal, we overlook the importance of this event. But the woman realizes this is a big deal. Women and men are not to interact in this culture, certainly not while they are alone. A gender barrier has been crossed.

Jews limited their interactions with Gentiles, and certainly would not eat or drink with a Gentile – a Samaritan even less. Religious, racial, and social boundaries have been crossed here as well. Jesus approached this woman, seemingly breaking all the rules as he did so.

Jesus approaches us in the same way. As we go about our daily business – at the well, at the grocery store, at work, in the park, walking the dog. Jesus approaches and makes a demand of us, he crosses social boundaries, he challenges us and makes us uncomfortable. He reveals our nature to us, and names our sins as he did to the woman. He also offers us his blessing.

Jesus has come to you this very week in this way, he has challenged you and prodded you in some way in your everyday life. Did you see him? Did you realize who was speaking to you? Jesus appeared to this woman as a dirty traveller at a well who was alone, with no friends and not even a ladle to scoop water. What did he look like when you saw him? Remember, whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do for me.

Moses struck the rock and released water for the Israelites to drink. Jesus offered the Samaritan woman at the well living water, water that will become a spring welling up into eternal life. The Israelites didn't deserve their water, neither did the Samaritan woman. But our God is a God who gives because of who he is, not because of who we are.

I came across a quote from the Little Prince last week – it is the time that I've spent on my rose that makes it valuable. God does not come to us and spend time with us because we are valuable. Instead, we are valuable because God comes to us and spends time with us. While we are still sinners, God

comes to us. When we are toddlers throwing tantrums because we can't have our way, God loves us and blesses us, and in so doing raises us up and empowers us.

We see at the end of the story that the woman went running back to her village to spread the news, and many believed because of this woman's testimony. It makes me think of another woman of ill repute later on in the book of John who discovered the empty tomb and went running to tell others. Both these women were used to bless others, despite their status in the eyes of others, indeed – for a short time Mary Magdalene was the entire church – the sole witness to the risen Christ.

Jesus has called each of us to this role – even as he reveals our sin he reveals his love and purpose for us – he reveals that we are called to greater things and reminds us that we were made to be powerful and free human beings, not beholden to our present circumstance, but image bearers of God.

I came across a poem based on the woman at the well which speaks of this idea of undeserved redemption and the call to be witnesses. This is *Known and Loved* by Erin Knight Hailey.

I am a woman of no distinction
of little importance.
I am a woman of no reputation
save that which is bad.

You whisper as I pass by and cast judgmental glances,
Though you don't really take the time to look at me,
Or even get to know me.

For to be known is to be loved,
And to be loved is to be known.
Otherwise what's the point in doing
either one of them in the first place?

I WANT TO BE KNOWN.

I want someone to look at my face
And not just see two eyes, a nose,
a mouth and two ears;
But to see all that I am, and could be
all my hopes, loves and fears.

But that's too much to hope for,
to wish for,
or pray for
So I don't, not anymore.

Now I keep to myself
And by that I mean the pain
that keeps me in my own private jail
The pain that's brought me here
at midday to this well.

To ask for a drink is no big request
but to ask it of me?
A woman unclean, ashamed,
Used and abused
An outcast, a failure
a disappointment, a sinner.

No drink passing from these hands
to your lips could ever be refreshing
Only condemning, as I'm sure you condemn me now
But you don't.

You're a man of no distinction;
Though of the utmost importance.
A man with little reputation, at least so far.

You whisper and tell me to my face
what all those glances have been about, and
You take the time to really look at me.
But don't need to get to know me.

For to be known is to be loved and
To be loved is to be known.

And you know me.
You actually know me;
all of me and everything about me.
Every thought inside and hair on top of my head;
Every hurt stored up, every hope, every dread.

My past and my future, all I am and could be.
You tell me everything,
you tell me about me!

And that which is spoken by another
would bring hate and condemnation.
Coming from you brings love, grace,
mercy, hope and salvation.

I've heard of one to come
who could save a wretch like me
And here in my presence, you say
I AM He.

To be known is to be loved;
And to be loved is to be known.

And I just met you.
But I love you.
I don't know you,
but I want to get to.

Let me run back to town
this is way to much for just me.
There are others: brothers,
sisters, lovers, haters.

The good and the bad, sinners and saints
who should hear what you've told me;
who should see what you've shown me;
who should taste what you gave me;
who should feel how you forgave me.

For to be known is to be loved;
And to be loved is to be known.
And they all need this, too.
We all do
Need it for our own.