

“Thirsting”**John 4.2–15****The Rev. Hal Chorpensing, Plymouth Congregational UCC, Fort Collins, Colorado****March 19, 2017**

Have you ever thought how fortunate we are to have great drinking water in Fort Collins? It's no accident that we are the home of two dozen breweries ranging from Black Bottle Brewery, which is about a half mile east of us on Prospect Road, and the behemoth Anheuser-Busch Brewery on I-25. Seriously, our water tastes great straight from the tap. Imagine what would happen to the brewing industry if we had the water problems faced by the residents of Flint, Michigan.

Water is one of those basic elements of survival that we actually think about in the western half of the United States. We understand how precious – and how divisive – water rights can be.

I am always intrigued by the approach in Colorado newspapers when reporting good news about snowpack – which is never straight-out good news: “The South Platte River Basin is at 138 percent of normal...but it may not last if spring rains don't arrive.” You know the good news – bad news drill, which is better than all bad news.

The desert setting for today's gospel story is even more dire. In a parched landscape without reservoirs, purification, and plumbing, water is even more dear. Wells in that setting were essential to life. And as Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well, we are all thirsting for water that will slake our parched souls...the living water that Jesus offers.

For many of us, and I include myself, we sometimes don't know exactly how to satisfy the inner thirst we experience. You know what I'm talking about: when we know in the depths of our being that something is wrong: when we're anxious or stressed out or depressed or lonely or fearful. We try to alleviate the discomfort we feel by grabbing a bag of potato chips or a bottle of scotch or a valium or we have an extramarital affair or smoke a joint or we take it out on our kids or our

spouses or we go shopping. We are thirsty, but clearly we don't know which well to drink from.

And now we as a nation are being reminded of an age-old thirst for justice, especially for the people Jesus called "the least of these, who are members of my family." And this week's budget announcement is just the tip of the iceberg. Those of us who have influence (even the influence of sending a postcard to a member of Congress) are being called upon to lift our voices for justice.

Whether the issue is increased defense spending or slashing Health and Human Services, the EPA, Agriculture, WIC, climate-change prevention programs, UN peacekeeping, and the complete defunding of the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting...this is going to be thirsty work. Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied, But it's going to take our involvement and labor, so get ready.

One way to prepare ourselves is to be sure that we are drawing from very deep spiritual wells. We all have a need for connection with something greater than we are...something transcendent and holy and numinous. But to acknowledge that God calls on us to work for justice and to try to tap into the wellspring of the holy has become fairly countercultural, especially in our current political climate.

Sometimes we each experience our own well running dry. We hit bottom or go broke or we have a personal crisis. The popular psychologist Brené Brown (whose work on perfectionism is currently being studied by a group here at Plymouth) initially called what she experienced a "breakdown." She recounts how in her own life, she licked alcoholism and was so obsessive about her diet that she knew the glycemic load of every food item on the shelves of her local grocery store, but then the well ran dry. A progressive Episcopalian who loves Marcus Borg, Brown tried to explain it to her therapist as a crisis, and her wise therapist

reframed it for her as a spiritual awakening, which is why she refers now refers to it as a “~~breakdown~~ spiritual awakening.”

When was the last time your well ran dry? When was the last time it really hit the fan? Have you ever thought of it as an opportunity for spiritual awakening? And how did you cope in the midst of that crisis? There are life-giving wells and poisoned wells from which we can drink. There are productive and destructive waters we can consume in trying to satisfy our thirst.

Physical fitness and psychological health are two life-giving wells from which you can drink. The third well is spiritual health. Carl Jung, the great Swiss psychoanalyst, stressed the importance of spirituality in the mix. Writing in 1965, Jung expressed it this way:

The decisive question for humanity is this: Are we related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of life. Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance... [and I would say, drinking from the wrong wells]. The more a person lays stress on false possessions, and the less sensitivity they have for what is essential, and the less satisfying they find life. ... If we understand and feel that here in this life we already have a link with the infinite, desires and attitudes change.

Most of you know this already...it isn't news, but perhaps it serves as a reminder.

Returning to the water metaphor, there is a necessity for reservoirs, purification, and plumbing in our spiritual lives as well as for our physical sustenance. That threefold water supply is part of the purpose of this and every church or synagogue or mosque or sangha or temple...because every individual runs dry on occasion. It is part of the human condition.

We each will experience a spiritual drought, and most of us don't have the reservoir necessary to see ourselves individually through moments of crisis or

drifting apart from God. I hope that for you, Plymouth is like a reservoir fed by deep springs: providing an ample supply of living water.

Our lives can become sullied by our own pollutants and we need rituals of cleansing. We sometimes lose perspective on what clean water really should taste like and my prayer for you is that you get a good mouthful of clean, living water in this church.

And the plumbing system for living water is all around you: it isn't just Jake and Jane Anne and me who are conduits of God's grace, but the people you see next to you in the pews. All of us help to supply living water to one another and to people far beyond this congregation. Together, we refill the reservoir.

If you ever wonder why church is important, just remember: it's about the deep well, reservoir, purification, and plumbing.



I would like to invite you to join me in a brief guided meditation if that is something you wish to do...and if not, that is fine also. I invite you to close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Allow your body to relax and your mind to come to a still point. Allow your self to open to the presence of God in this place.

And imagine that you are in a dry and arid land. It is hot and dusty. You hear a dry wind blowing the sand around your feet. You walk along through this desert wilderness seeing only the occasional cactus and you begin to sense your thirst.

Ahead of you, you see a man standing by a well. As you draw nearer he invites you to come and have a drink. He is a familiar figure to you, and you recognize him as Jesus. He draws water up and offers it to you in a cup. As you taste the water it is cool and sweet. You sense that your deepest thirst falling away. You feel refreshed and cooled by the water he has offered you. And you sense an inner calm washing over you. [pause]

You realize that any time you thirst for living water, it is available to you...that you can come to the well and that Jesus will draw up that clear, cool water and hold it out for you.

As you prepare to walk forward through the wilderness, you offer thanks for that living water. And as you continue your journey, Jesus offers you his blessing and his promise that he will supply living water whenever you need it.

So, as you are ready, allow yourself to come back into this time and place. Take a deep breath, open your eyes. And know that the presence of Christ is in this and every place with you.

May the water God provides bless you.

May God's gift of water be available to all people.

May it slake our thirst, wash our wounds, refresh our tired bodies.

May its sound calm our anxiety and stress.

May the holiness of water, which comprises much of our bodies and God's earth, remind you of your own baptism into our faith.

Amen.

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