

What are you thirsty for?

In Exodus, the people of Israel are thirsty. Wilderness thirsty. The kind of thirst that makes you cranky, like the people in the Snickers commercials. The kind of thirst that turns small inconveniences into major crises.

And sure enough, they have begun to spiral. "Why did you bring us out here?" they complain. "Was Egypt so bad?"

Which is pretty remarkable, because Egypt was slavery.

But when you are uncomfortable, even slavery can start to look like "the good old days." When the present feels uncertain, the past suddenly doesn't look so bad after all.

Well, we know how that works, don't we?

When we feel anxious, worn down, or unsure about what comes next, it is very easy to romanticize another time. Remember when everything felt simpler? Remember when church was full of children? Remember when our knees did not make quite so much noise getting out of bed?

Thirst does that. It edits our memory. And conveniently, we forget that the "good old days" weren't so good for everyone.

"Do not harden your hearts", the psalm tells us. It does not say, "Do not be thirsty." It does not say, "Do not be afraid."

Because the problem isn't thirst. The problem is uncertainty. The problem is letting fear become the norm. And when we find ourselves there in the wilderness without what had been familiar, well, we tend to look to find comfort in other places.

Jesus is with another, yet different kind of thirsty person on this day. A Samaritan woman at a well in the middle of the day.

And this is not neutral territory. Jews and Samaritans did not mix. There was history there. History that brings with it suspicion and division. Common ground was not very common.

And yet Jesus does what Jesus does. He begins with something common. He asks for a drink.

It is disarming. Vulnerable, even.

And this woman talks with him. And it is not a casual exchange that they have. It is pretty real, even a little comical at times. She questions him. She pushes him. She wonders out loud. She even gets into a bit of theology with him.

I think Jesus might have been amused at first. But this woman intrigues him. And so he hangs in with the exchange. And perhaps that's the point of this. Not just the living water, but the staying.

The ragtag people of Israel in the wilderness wonder about whether God is still hanging in. "Is the Lord among us or not?"

But this woman at the well comes to realize God is right there with her.

Maybe that is part of our thirst right now. We may be thirsty for reassurance. For stability. For common ground in a world where "common" feels harder and harder to find.

And staying in conversation is not easy. It is much easier to retreat. Or to declare that nothing will ever change. Or to scroll past one another.

But the refreshment found in living water flows in relationship. We hear about it all the time in church on Sundays. And the Gospel illustrates it for us over and over. Relationship flows when we admit we don't have this living stuff all figured out. It flows when we risk listening. It flows when we stay a little longer than is comfortable.

Water came from a rock in the wilderness, not because the people were calm and spiritually grounded, but quite the opposite. Because God was faithful even to a group of tired, fearful, grumbling wanderers. Living water flowed at a well in Samaria, not because the woman had a perfect life, but because she stayed in the conversation.

So perhaps this Lent the invitation is simple. Stay.

Stay when you are thirsty. Stay close to the Gospel when you are tempted to idealize the past. Stay when the conversation feels awkward. Stay long enough for your heart to soften. Stay long enough to notice Christ beside you.

The danger is not being thirsty. The danger is letting our hearts become dry and hard.

And the good news is this. Even when we are like those cranky wilderness wanderers, even when we show up at the well with complicated stories, God is still among us.

And living water is still being offered. So, let's drink.

Amen.