

2021.09.19 SERMON WATER 17th Sunday of Pentecost ©Gyllian Daviest

WATER. Water is life, sanitation is dignity. Perhaps you heard the news story this week about Shoal Lake 40 First Nation and their new water plant. Shoal Lake is the water source for the city of Winnipeg. The community of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, with 667 registered members, and 300 people actually living there is right next to Shoal Lake. And yet, this has been a community without potable water. They have been under boil water advisories for almost 30 years. They're only 24 kilometers from the Trans-Canada highway yet there has been no road into this community, no way to bring in the heavy equipment and building supplies needed to build a water treatment plant. And then slowly, slowly, change began. This past Wednesday a new water treatment plant was officially opened. Clean drinking water for all. Clean water to cook with, to wash vegetables with, to bathe babies and elders with. Water is life, sanitation is dignity.

Here on Salt Spring this past summer we experienced a tiny fraction of that scarcity of water as the drought went on and on. Some of us knew the fear of dropping levels of ground water and wondering if wells would run dry. A tiny taste of what much of the world experiences daily.

In our Gospel, Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water, water that quenches all thirst forever. He tells her, *"The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."*

This is such an interesting Gospel. It's a classic example of "It's not what you think!" And it's also a story full of anomalies, things to make people back then say, "Wait! What?!" If we lived in that time we would know that nobody goes to draw water in the middle of the day when it's hottest. That's crazy talk. And we'd know that no self-respecting Jew would talk to a Samaritan. And certainly no Jewish man would speak to a Samaritan woman. If we were people of that time listening to this story we would be leaning forward, wondering what the heck was going to come next. Because so far everything we just heard broke all the rules of what's normal and sane. We would be all ears. As first century Jews we would know this encounter is taking place at the most famous well of all, Jacob's well, a symbol of ancient Israel. Something deeply important is about to be revealed. And since wells and water are traditional symbols of God's presence we would know we're now in the realm of the sacred.

And then Jesus says those words: *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty."* Imagine never being 'thirsty' again. Imagine all your secret yearnings, your profound desires for the presence of God to be real in your life, your profound desire to know

that your life has meaning, your deep desire to understand your purpose here on earth, your desire to love and be loved - all these 'thirsts' being quenched. Imagine!

Water *is* a basic human need. I recall reading "The Waterman's Daughter" by Canadian writer Emma Ruby-Sachs. In it a young Canadian woman arrives in a South African community, desperate to understand the murder of her father, a water engineer bringing progress to the township. As the story unfolds we discover nothing is as it seems - a bit like the Gospel story. Progress is portrayed as freeing the residents from long trips to the river for water of dubious quality by bringing clean tap water into the centre of the township. Only it turns out that the only cost of the river water is the time and energy it takes to go and get it. The new tap water has a dollar price on it. Many are poor. What will happen to them? I think of corporations and governments intent on buying up vast quantities of Canada's water. Will there be enough clean drinking water for everyone on the planet in the future?

Cause you *do* understand that until all of us on earth have access to clean water, water that is less than a 30 minute walk from our home, until that is a reality for all people on earth, the water we drink will never be truly sweet? You do get that, right? What we have cannot be the living water if we're the only ones who have it.

But it's more than simply water, isn't it. It's about understanding our interconnectedness, about believing with all we have that every single human on the earth belongs to God, is beloved of God, is treasure to God. It's about recognizing and honouring the dignity and validity of the deep yearnings of each and every soul on the planet. It's that moment when we get it - Jesus didn't just come for us. He came for everyone.

So then our questions might become these: How are we called to be the living waters? And where and when and how do we refuse to be the living waters? And what are we going to do about *that*? If we are divided against each other we cannot be the living waters; we become instead a living drought, or actually a dying land in drought. The water of life, offered to us by Jesus, is a gift - if we want it. Can we bring ourselves to open our hearts to receive it? The living spirit flowing through us all for all of time? How do we get there? I pray we find the understanding, the wisdom, the tenacity, the compassion required to find our way.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world, you are the living water. Fill our minds with your peace, fill our hearts with your love.

Amen.