

Sharing God's Gift of Water

We live in an area of the world, and of Canada, that is blessed with an abundance of water. We are surrounded by the Great Lakes. The Grand River flows through our region.

Sometimes that abundance of water becomes too much as the river overflows its banks every spring. There is the familiar picture of the flood in Cambridge in 1974 and the police officer standing in his assigned position at the corner up to his chest in water. The towns of New Hamburg and Ayr have streets closed every year when the water rises.

Admittedly there are some limitations placed on our water usage during the summer, such as limiting which days and times we can water our lawns or wash our cars. Rarely do we have to worry about the drinkability of the water except occasionally when the main pipes are being cleaned – that is a small price to pay.

This was until very recently. When a stop was placed on new building permits because there is an estimate of insufficient water supply available for all the new housing. I believe that this is a more complex situation than some of the press reports may have suggested. And solutions are not as simple as stopping new builds. It certainly brings the issue of our water supply to everyone's attention.

We get most of our water from wells that draw on the aquifers below ground. It is supplemented by drawing some water from the Grand River. The reports suggest that that we have been drawing water from the aquifers faster than the aquifers are being replenished by nature.

Some rural residents who have their own wells are reporting that their wells have been running dry more often and for longer periods of time. This would back up the reports that the level in the aquifer is below what it has been.

Two primary reasons are given, one that we are drawing a lot of water because there are a lot of people and the second is that climate change is negatively impacting the rate that the aquifer is being refilled – it is hotter than before and there is less rain. We have gone from a sense of abundance to a feeling of scarcity. This is a high-level summary of a complex problem.

However, the truth is that our water problems are rather small compared to those in many other parts of the world. A recent report released on January 20 from the United Nations suggests that the world has entered an "Era of Global Water Bankruptcy."

As the UN report observes, "Water can be scarce for many reasons: demand for water may be exceeding supply, water infrastructure may be inadequate, or institutions may be failing to balance everyone's needs." That some are getting more than their fair share. "Water scarcity is an increasing problem on every continent, with poorer communities most badly affected." What we do know is that water is a finite resource in growing demand. Climate change is making water scarcity worse. Women and girls are among the hardest hit.

In Canada we have our own problems. There have been severe droughts in the southern Prairies and the interior of BC. The lack of clean water in many northern First Nations communities is a well-documented and a long-standing problem.

Lack of water and lack of potable water is not new. The Israelites in their 40-year trek across the desert from Egypt to Israel dealt with many water issues. Today we heard as they

camped at Rephidim. The people are quarrelling with Moses – again. There is no water; they, their children and their livestock are thirsty.

When they have what they need and want, they believe that God is with them. In times of hunger, thirst and affliction they reckon that they have been abandoned or betrayed. Even worse, they wonder if God has travelled with them. We can sympathize.

Moses cries out to God that the people are ready to stone him. God tells him to take the staff that he used to strike the Nile, and he should go to a rock that God will show him, strike it and water will come pouring out.

God will provide enough. We do not need to take any extra.

The psalmist reminds us of all that God has given us and to give joyful thanks for all the gifts we have been given, the dry land and the seas, and to make a joyful noise.

It is water and thirst that bring Jesus and the Samaritan woman into contact with each other. Jesus is taking the direct route from Jerusalem to Galilee. More often, the Jews travelling between these two places would detour to the east and go along the River Jordan. It was a longer but safer journey, avoiding the Samaritan territory. The Jews looked down on and discriminated against the Samaritans.

Finding drinkable water on the journey was important, along with shade from the sun. It was a time for the traveller to rest. Noon would not have been the normal time for a resident to go out to the well. Usually, they would go in the cool of the morning or the evening, when it would be easier to carry the heavy jar of water home. The woman possibly came at noon because she knew that the rest of the community would not be there to taunt or shun her.

In a society where: men and women rarely talk to each other, where Judeans look down on Samaritans, it is water, so necessary for life that brings the woman and Jesus together, it is water that allows them to meet, to connect and to have a conversation. The woman truly understood what it would mean to be not thirsty, to have her thirst quenched, both physically and spiritually. The woman knew what it meant to have fair access to resources, those resources so critical for life, for survival. To have access to enough clean water.

As we, in this region, grapple with the thought that perhaps our abundant clean water supply may not be as limitless as we had thought, we are called to consider: how we care for our water supply, how we steward our resources, so that there is enough for everyone.

What actions, or activities, or acquisitions can we do without? Are there products or services that use a lot of water that we do not really need? Computer chips use a lot of electricity and water. Do we really need all of the AI? Do we change our values on aesthetics? Do we need a green lawn? Does our car need to be spotlessly clean?

Can we use less water so that others may have some? Can we keep our water clean and safe for all to drink?

Water is a gift from God. A life-giving gift. A life-saving gift. Can we share so that others have enough?

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Readings: John 4:5-42 Exodus 17:1-7