

Third Sunday in Lent • March 27, 2011
St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA
Rev. Braun Campbell
John 4:5-26

"On the Lenten Road: At the Well"

There are some people in our congregation that I don't understand: marathon runners and distance cyclists. You know who you are. Aside from the health benefits and physical fitness that comes along with hours of training and exercise, these people enjoy the challenge associated with pushing themselves to the limits of their abilities – and beyond. They run or ride for miles and miles. And if that isn't enough of a challenge, some of these athletes decide that they're going to throw in some swimming, too, and make it a triathlon. More power to them, but I don't think that's my thing. This weekend, D.C. is hosting the National Marathon, another opportunity for these disciplined folks to put themselves to the test. And while competing in a marathon doesn't hold much interest for me, there *is* a role in marathon-running that's much more my speed: the hydration specialist. You know these folks – you might have even done this yourself – the people who staff those waypoints along the race and hand out cups or bottles of water as the runners or cyclists pass by. (Sure, there's probably some other, *real* name for this role, but doesn't "hydration specialist" sound cooler?) These people play a critical role in the race. Without them, the competitors would have to carry their own water. Any runner or cyclist who hopes to have a chance at finishing a race – let alone winning one – knows how important hydration is for keeping them going. **Water is fuel. Water is life.**

Even if you're not a competitive athlete, you need water. We all do. That's pretty common knowledge. According to the Mayo Clinic, most people should consume between two and three liters of fluids per day, and if that's just water, all the better. The human body needs water to function: it's essential if everything's going to work the way it should. **That's the way we're built.** If you're not getting the water that you need, you feel it: headaches, cramps, fatigue, maybe dizziness and fever. Dehydration can be dangerous.

At the marathon, I imagine that runners will have easy access to water, thanks in part to the work of those hydration specialists. We do pretty well on that front here, too. If you're thirsty, you can head to a faucet in the kitchen or at a drinking fountain for fresh, clean water. You can carry it around with you wherever you go (something that I often do). You can go to the store and get super-filtered, vitamin-enhanced water that was delivered from a mountain spring. You can even get caffeinated water! With all this water so readily available, it's easy to be indifferent about it. Even though water is so essential to our health and life, we probably take it for granted. So what happens when the water's gone?

Have you ever had the water go out on you, like when a main bursts or utility work has to be done? Can't wash the dishes – can't even really use the kitchen. No washing the car or watering the flowers. And using the bathroom is right out! **When the water's gone, you really start to realize how essential it is.**

You're probably heard this story of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well. She didn't have running water in her kitchen, so she had to take the walk to the well outside town to get the water that she needed. The people of this town and their ancestors before them had come here for water for generations upon generations. The water was there at the well, but so was something even more essential: God's Word of promise personified in Jesus of Nazareth. At the well, Jesus talks with the woman and speaks to her of living water, a kind unlike any that could be drawn from this or any ancient well or 21st century faucet. This water, he tells her, is one that he gives. This water becomes a spring in the person he gives it to, a fountain that brings eternal life, a well of salvation. This water that Jesus offers meets a person's deepest need, reconnection with God.

Stopping today at the well on the Lenten road, God is again offering us the living water that comes from Jesus. That living water comes to us through God's word of promise in Jesus the Messiah, the promise that God has come to address the deepest need in our dry, parched lives. He has come to reconnect us with the God who created and sustains us. Jesus' living water comes to us through his word

in the Holy Scriptures, in Genesis and Revelation and every book in between. In the Bible, we hear again and again how God has been at work throughout history to bring deliverance to His people, and how that happens in the ultimate fashion through His Son. As Christians, we need to hear this word of promise, this word of forgiveness and reconciliation, this word of hope, every day. Like water, every human being needs to drink in the living water that comes through God's Word, and dehydration is dangerous. **That's the way we're built.**

Here in our congregation and even in our nation at large, we have amazingly easy access to God's Word. Like water, we can pick it up at home. We can carry it with us. And thanks to the widespread availability of the Internet, God's Word is accessible through most any Web browser or mobile device. **But like the water that's so easily available to us, we've grown indifferent to the living water that comes through the living Word of Scripture.** We have forgotten how essential it is and how we need it on a daily basis if we want to be healthy. We might try to get our two to three liters of water each day, but we don't set aside even ten or fifteen minutes to drink in the Bible through reading and devotions. Instead, we buy in to the message of the world around us, like the Samaritan woman, trying and failing to meet the need we feel in ways that ultimately disappoint.

Christians are spiritual athletes, called to run with endurance the race set before us (Heb. 12:1). The race is life. Like any race, you need to stay hydrated if you hope to make it to the finish line. Today, God is calling you to drink at the well of His word and to know the comfort of living water, a spring that will keep on flowing for every day of your life. You and I are connected with that spring in Baptism, when we were set apart to run the race of life. Jesus himself is our "hydration specialist," supplying us with the living water that he gives to us – water from the Rock of our salvation. As the one who has already run and won the race for us, **Jesus' word is fuel. His word is life.**

But here's the thing about Christians: we're not just called to run the race. **God makes us "hydration specialists," too.** You and I are a lot like those people who hand out water to the runners and cyclists along the racecourse. An amazing aspect of the Holy Spirit's work is how He makes us springs of hope and strength for the people around us. There are people in your life right now who are parched and weary from the race of life, having gone for so long without the living water that God offers through His Son. They, too, have tried to meet their deepest need without success. Reconnected to God through Jesus, the living water that He gives you becomes a well of salvation, one that you can share with the world. **Running the race, we also serve as agents of God's grace to help those who run alongside us.** With that ever-flowing spring of faith fed the Spirit in God's Word, you will have Jesus' living water to give to all the runners who pass your way.

So in this time of Lent, as we continue our journey on the Lenten road, **how can we draw from the well of living water that is ours in Christ?** Like ordinary water, you have to go to a source if you want to drink. For us Christians, we need to spend time with the Lord in His Word. Even though that sounds simple, we all know that there are many distractions, diversions, and due dates calling for our attention. We all have 24 hours in a day. Make a plan. Set aside time in your routine for reading the Bible and prayer. Write it down on your calendar or agenda. Set an alarm with your smartphone. Have a designated spot at home, work, or school for this time of devotion. Then, once you are drinking in God's word, reflect both on how it convicts you of your need for God's mercy and how it points you to His grace.

I still don't understand those athletes who run or bike for miles on end; however, I respect their discipline in training. They've learned that water is fuel, water is life. On the Lenten road, enjoy and drink in the living water we have in Jesus. **He is our fuel. He is our life.**

Amen.