

“Sister Water”

Revelation 22: 1-5; John 4: 7-15

This week, Sister Water is our guide on our journey of through Lent. I have to tell you that I thought this would be the easiest sermon to write of this series because well...water is so much a part of our conversation, so much a part of our ritual and tradition as people of faith. Just think about it. We use water images in almost every aspect of our church life when we are trying to describe our connection to the presence of God. We use water images when we talk about our baptism. On the Sunday when we celebrate the renewal of our baptisms, I say to each and every person who is here for worship that day, “You are God’s Beloved” as I invite everyone to dip their hands into the water, to feel it washing us clean, readying us for the new year ahead. As we dip our hands in the water, I invite everyone to remember what it was like when we emerged from the baptismal waters, to remember how we felt the water running down our faces; reviving us as a child of God.

We also use water images when we are acknowledging that we are spiritually dry and are in need of God’s presence in our lives. We say things like as a deer longs for the waters, our souls long for you or we remember the words of

the prophet Isaiah as he invited a disoriented down trodden group of people to come to the waters, come all you who are thirsty and be satisfied by the waters of God.”

Water is an essential part of our life as people of faith when it comes to our understanding our relationship with God. It is also an essential piece of our lives as people of faith when it comes to understanding our relationship with other people as well. We hear from the prophet Amos when he sees that the people of Israel had forgotten the connection of community, when he sees the people going through the motions of their faith all the while ignoring the cries of the widows and orphans. When Amos looks around at the disparity filling his community, he calls out to God, praying for God’s justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like a flowing stream.

This may be a familiar phrase to many of us because we remember MLK using the same phrase in his I Have a Dream Speech, reminding the United States that it is not enough to see people as second class citizens because of the color of their skin. Through these words, the same words that Amos used to remind the people of God of their calling, MLK reminds the United States that in God’s Kingdom, waters of justice, waters of hope, waters that bring healing and wholeness to and for all of God’s children will roll down. They will wash away the brokenness and division of our nation, renewing and restoring us once more.

Water is an essential element for us as people of faith. It gives us life. It renews us and restores us. Water becomes the key for us as people of faith to become the people God created and calls us to be. So why didn't this sermon flow for me this week?

As I lived with Sister Water this past week, I realized that it wasn't her. It was me or should I say. It is all of us and how we view the Kingdom of God, working in our world.

Let me explain. Let's take a look at how St. Francis describes Sister Water. He uses the words, "useful, humble, precious and pure." Almost like she is some passive force in our world, moving along at a sedate pace, willing us, allowing us to control her at our whim. And that couldn't be further from the truth.

Water is one of the most powerful forces in our world. Even if it is just flowing along, it is still shaping the world around it, wearing down the sharp edges of the rocks until they are smooth stones. As water moves along, it washes up on the shore, carving out the land as it ripples by.

I think I get what St. Francis was trying to do here when he uses these particular words to describe water. After all, there have been many times I have set beside a body of water, either a mountain stream, an ocean or a lake and have been mesmerized by its beauty, experiencing the purity of that moment.

But useful, I'm not so sure I get "useful" when I look at and experience this essential element of our life, an essential element of our faith Here's why I say this...When we start seeing something as useful, it becomes a commodity. It becomes something to serve us. It becomes something to be used and then discarded.

When we start thinking about water like this, when we start thinking about our faith this way, When we start thinking about the Kingdom of God in this way, we miss the point. When we view these things as commodities, then we try to limit them as meant only for a select few and ignore their power to restore us, to revive us once more.

Or let me say it another way....I want to do a little demonstration. Don't worry. I'll get back into the pulpit in just a few minutes.

I want us all to see what happens when we start thinking of water as a commodity, as something to be used and abused, as something that is meant to serve only us.

(Water demonstration)

http://www.globalministries.org/resources_youth_and_children_water_activities_a_global_water

Think about how much water we use every day. From showers to dishwashers, to washing machines to ice makers. Even drinking our required glasses of water each day. I want everyone to keep that in mind. Think about how much water we use every day.

Because these two bowls represent the amount of water in our entire Earth. Two thirds of our planet is water. However 97% of all water on Earth is in oceans and seas. Waters in these bodies contain solids, mostly salts. It's okay for transportation, and recreation uses but not for drinking, washing or irrigating crops or other industrial purposes. So if these two bowls represent all of the water available on the planet, then about 4.5 cups represents fresh water.

This is our fresh water supply. Seems like a good amount. But of this amount. 3.5 cups is trapped in glaciers, ice caps soil or the atmosphere. In other words it is out of our reach. That leaves us with the equivalent of one cup of water that is fresh and available for us.

This is the fresh water available to us, for all the people on Earth.

But some of this is in isolated areas with limited access. Some is trapped so deep underground that it is beyond even well-digging depths. Some is too polluted to drink. So that leaves us the equivalent of about 10 drops of water that is fresh and available for us and readily accessible to humans.

Of these 10 drops, North Americans use a disproportionate share. We use over 400,000 gallons of water a year. Of the 1.3 million gallons used by the world's people annually, that's about 36 percent. So of these 10 drops, we get 3 ½ and the rest of the world's population gets 7.

6 % of the world's population uses 36% of the Earth's fresh water supply. The remaining 94% shares the remaining amount. That's barely enough to cover the bottom of this small bowl.

It is clear that many of us in North America are not the ones going thirsty. The consumption rate of our nation along with so many others has increased faster than the Earth's population. Our atmosphere is a closed system. No new water is coming in and none leaves. We have the same amount God gave us in the beginning. But there are more of us to use it and we pollute more than we once did, rendering more and more of it useless to us.

This is what happens when we turn water into a commodity. This is what happens when we turn water into something we see as useful, as something to only here to serve us. This unequal distribution is what happens when we turn something through which we experience the life giving, life transforming power of God, something through which we experience life, this unequal distribution of God's abundance is what happens when we see something as "useful"

The same thing can be said of the Kingdom of God. When we turn an essential element of our understanding of the very character of God into something to be used and then discarded, we lose the very essence of our faith.

We have turned the promise of a day when all nations will come together, the promise of the river of life flowing from the throne of God, bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's creation, we have turned Jesus' promise of the living

waters into a commodity, into a passive force in our world, ignoring its power and strength to transform us into the people God created us to be.

You see, when Jesus is talking with the woman at the well and when John shares his vision of the Kingdom of God, they understood that this living water was not something that described scarcity. It describes the abundance of the Kingdom of God. For Jesus, For John, the living waters impart vitality and renewal. They satisfies the deepest longing of the soul. They become central to the well-being of the people of God. The living water that Jesus talks about and John dreams about has the power to transform communities from being broken places into gardens filled with grace and love. They are a direct gift from God.

Too many times we have treated these living waters as something to be used only by us, controlled only by us. Too many times we have said that there isn't enough to go around and we have tried to limit who gets to draw from the well spring of God. We have tried to limit who gets to experience these living waters that have the power to satisfy the longings of our souls. Unfortunately, as people of faith, too many times we have seen these living waters as something useful only for us. And we have ignored the cries of those who thirst for justice, those who thirst for compassion. We have ignored the cries for righteousness to flow like a stream bringing forth the new life. We have hoarded the living waters only for ourselves and ignore the fact that there are people in our community, in our nation,

in our world who are dying of thirst right now. We have used more than our share of God's grace and God's love and then turn around to tell others there is not enough to go around.

As I lived with Sister Water this past week, I realized it is not her. For you see, that river of life still flows in our world, running down from the mountain of God, flowing into our world, making the rough places smooth, and the crooked places straight. Sister Water is not the issue. It's us and how we view the Kingdom of God at work in the world. We view it as something that is only available for a select few, or at least the select few that think like us or look like us, and yes even those who vote like us. We try to limit who will receive the grace and love of God and that couldn't be further from the truth? Our God is a God of abundance. There is more than enough to go around, more than enough Living Water, more than enough grace, more than enough love. There is more than enough room at the Table, where the river of life still flows, bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's children.

Except that is not the reality we want to see. Except that is not the reality we want to share. We only want to hear that the promise of Living Waters is only enough to satisfy my needs.

Did you know that the United Nations estimates that in less than 25 years, if current water consumption trends continue, 5 billion, billion with a b, 5 billion people will live in areas where it will be impossible or difficult to meet basic water needs for sanitation, cooking and drinking. That is 5 billion people will not have easy access to even the 13 gallons a day they need to survive.

No the problem is not Sister Water. The problem is us and how we view her. The problem is that we view these living waters as something useful, as something to serve only us and our needs. The problem is that we have forgotten to be the people God created and called us to be. From the moment, God formed us into being through the waters of life, we have been called to invite all to come to the well-spring of God and satisfy the longings of their souls.

As people of faith, we need to realize that there is something so much more important than seeing water, as seeing faith, as seeing the Kingdom of God as useful. This something is reclaiming our identity as ones made in the image of God, reclaiming our purpose to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's creation. This something is reconnecting to the Living Water that resides in us and around us and sharing this Living Water with all who thirst.

There is more than enough of the Living Water for all of God's children to come and satisfy their thirst. With these 10 drops of water, all who thirst are called

to quench the dryness that fills their lives, to come and wash away all that prevents us from experiencing God's Kingdom here on earth. With these 10 drops, there is more than enough for all of God's children to come and drink from the well-spring of God and thirst no more.

So on this day and every day, may we invite the life giving nature of Sister Water in our hearts as she inspires us to satisfy the cries of all who thirst. May our prayer always be that God's justice will roll down like water and God's righteousness be like an ever-flowing stream, restoring us and reviving us once more. Amen.