

## **Will you give me a drink?**

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Texts: Exodus 17:1-7, John 4:5-42

Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?' But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?' So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' The Lord said to Moses, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

John 4:5-42

Jesus and his disciples came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, '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. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

This text resonated with a contemporary story I read recently: a child nicknamed Demon, hard to handle kid. An orphan, unwanted by anyone. His social worker is overworked and indifferent. Unscrupulous foster parents who neglect his needs and force him to work, illegally, at a convenience store. How can that child survive? Demon is fed, thanks to the store's owner, Mr. Ghosh, an East Indian, who gives him leftover hotdogs and sodas. Demon learns that his benefactor is a *dalit*, an untouchable, the lowest of the low in India. *Dalit* may not touch anything belonging to an upper caste person. They can't handle upper caste food. If touch accidentally occurs, the upper caste person has to undergo ritual cleansing.



It sounds a lot like the relationship between Jesus' people, the Jews, and the Samaritans. No wonder the woman in the story couldn't believe it when she meets him in the heat of the day and Jesus asks her for a drink.

Mr. Ghosh, now a US citizen, takes the greatest pleasure in putting food directly into people's hands. Here, he is accepted, as he has accepted an unwanted orphan named Demon. Demon needs to be fed. Mr. Ghosh gets joy from feeding him. There is reciprocity there. Mutual acceptance. As there is reciprocity, give and take, between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Each asks the other, "Will you give me a drink?" It's hard to ask for help, but each has a thirst needing to be quenched. They reveal their humanity, their vulnerability.

Mr. Ghosh is a minor character in the Barbara Kingsolver novel, *Demon Copperhead*. But Kingsolver weaves her story around other "untouchables": out-of-work coal miners, meth and opioid addicts, losers. And other, more derogatory, terms. And, indirectly, she indicts the people and systems that exploit them, use them up, and throw them away.

Some people today are dying of thirst: they lack clean water, food, security, love, respect, education, and any chance to fulfill their potential.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Some people today are dying of spiritual thirst. They can't let go of what they think they have earned and deserve. They forget they only hold the bucket. They forget where the water comes from, that the well belongs to God. They forget that, holding the bucket, they have the means to share.



Some people today are dying to share what they have, but have no way to do it. I heard a heartfelt prayer for the people of California who are buried under snow, without water, food, meds, fuel to keep from freezing. The one who prayed would love, I know, to fill those needs. But how?

A news story this week announced the closure of the hospital run by Doctors without Borders in Port au Prince, Haiti. Out-of-control gang violence makes it too dangerous for patients to get to the hospital. Can you imagine the anguish of those doctors, knowing they have the skill to save lives, and yet they are prevented from doing so by circumstances beyond their control?

Go back to our query: What are you thirsty for today? Whose thirst do you wish you could quench? Think metaphorically. A sick relative whose illness you cannot cure? A country under attack whose people you cannot protect? A refugee from the terror in her home country, dying of thirst together with her children at our southern border?



Today's gospel story begs us to remember the needs we share with all people. After the earthquake, a Turkish couple ran to find each other. They had planned to marry but now, they say: "We can't have a wedding when we have so many dead." How would Jesus satisfy their thirst? At the wedding in Cana, he turned water to wine, and blessed the whole community. Can we bless the hungry and thirsty of the world with our generosity? They are not untouchable. Neither are we.

Do you remember the other time in John's gospel that Jesus asked for a drink? On the cross, just before he died, he said, "I am thirsty!" Yes, in his hour of utmost weakness, out of his own thirst, in his own dying, he gave us all "a spring of water, gushing up to eternal life."

Jesus also said, "Whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones will not lose their reward." But here's the dilemma. God sometimes asks us to give what we don't have, to do what we can't do. Moses faced an angry mob of Israelites who were ready to kill him because they were thirsty. God ordered him to do the impossible: to strike a rock to make the water flow, to quench their thirst and to remind them where the water comes from, and who owns the well.



What are you thirsty for? Whose thirst can you quench? This is not an academic or rhetorical question. Today, right now, God is asking you to consider: how will you as a congregation go on being God's people in Rochester? How can this church survive? What are *you* thirsty for? What do you need? Whose thirst can you quench? Pray on this as you listen to what Steve Garnaas-Holmes has written in his poem, "Strike the Rock."

Sometimes  
life will be demanded of you that you don't have.  
Miracles will be asked of you that you can't do.  
Faith will be expected of you that you can't always maintain.  
Hope will be needed, hope you may not have.

This happens to leaders, happens to parents, to friends.  
Sometimes it happens with your own life.  
Sometimes you will have nothing to offer.  
You won't know what to do, or how to do it.  
You have no idea how to strike the rock.  
Strike the rock anyway.  
The power is not in your power,  
not in your strength or skill.  
The unseen awaits in the sanctuary,

in the holy empty space of your unknowing,  
in the shimmering vacancy of your willingness.  
Strike the rock. And have a bucket ready.

#### Indebtedness: IMAGES

From *The Atlantic Photo*:

\* Snow in Running Springs, California. Residents throughout the San Bernardino Mountains remain trapped in their homes by snow on March 1, 2023. # David McNew / Getty

\*Yusuf Kurma and Aysel Ozcelik sit holding hands in one of the carriages at İskenderun train station as they talk about their upcoming marriage, in İskenderun, Turkey, on February 18, 2023. Turkish authorities have been racing to find accommodation for the more than 1.5 million people left homeless after February's huge earthquakes. Survivors have been sheltering in tents, container homes, hotel resorts, and even train carriages in İskenderun, a port city in the province of Hatay that was badly hit by the earthquakes. The couple, who planned to marry, ran to find each other after the first shock. Now they might postpone the wedding. "We can't have a wedding when we have so many dead," Ozcelik said. # Eloisa Lopez / Reuters

\*Moses, by John August Swanson, 1983. From **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-image/act-image-link.pl?RC=56554> [retrieved March 11, 2023].

#### WRITINGS

*Demon Copperhead*, Barbara Kingsolver, 2022.

“Strike the Rock,” Steve Garnaas-Holmes, [www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net), March 9.

#### Prayers

God of abundance, you invite all who are thirsty to come and drink. We are thirsty for the assurance of your presence. Guide our elders as they work with the Presbytery to define new leadership and bless our search for a generous future.

May that future include a positive role in our community and our world. May we be drawn to the places where our need meets the need in others. We know there are too many distressed people and too many troubled spots in the world for us to care for each one; yet we know you also call us to do the impossible at times. Give us faith to persevere in finding our calling. Bless this community of healing, and all who travel here seeking answers.

Thank you for reminding us that death is not the end, but the beginning of new life in you. Remember us in your love and teach us to pray, “Our Father and Mother in heaven...”