

### **Boot Camp 4 the Soul: Hydrate**

We live in a time when the lack of clean water is becoming a crisis. Access to water defines what property has value, and in some societies makes women and children valuable to attack as they venture to acquire their daily water.

Water comforts and cleanses, as well as destroys by its abundance or scarcity. We are dependent on water, and we illustrate that dependence as we carry it around in containers, sucking on it for dear life. We need to stay hydrated, (particularly when engaging in physical activity), lest our efforts at transformation be compromised by lack of essential fluid.

So many stories of the Bible are stories of water. From creation to the river of life in the end of time, we are a people whose spirituality is framed in the cleansing and life-giving qualities of water.

This Sunday of Lent, we particularly note how spiritual hydration is essential for the transformation we seek. In today's readings the people and then Jesus are simply thirsty. In response to their thirst, they ask for water. It seems reasonable to me.... New life is offered to the Samaritan woman in this ancient site where she and Jesus share common origins, Jacob's well, and all the people of her town are invited to know Jesus through her good news. The Hebrew people point out that they need water, which invites Moses into a conversation with God that creates water from a stone.

When was the last time you were *really* thirsty? I mean really thirsty. Maybe it was after an intense workout at the gym or after several hours of hard labor in the hot sun – gardening around a beloved church comes to mind – as do many mission trips. Our bodies need water not just to survive, but also to thrive. In order for our bodies to function, they need water. And when our bodies do not get enough water – or if the water is bad – remember our neighbors in Flint – our bodies get dehydrated, and start to break down. Did you know that one of the leading causes of falling in older adults is fainting due to dehydration.? Health and nutrition experts repeatedly tell us, that we are not drinking the amount of water needed for our bodies to function. Here's your commercial announcement: 'the AMA suggests drinking a minimum of 8 – 8oz glasses of water a day.' Hum.... Well I'm drinking 3 – 12 oz cups of coffee.....my doctor said that doesn't count..... But what happens when you drink more than enough water, and you still feel dehydrated? Have you ever had a similar experience? I have.

I've lived most of my life in a more humid climate. I've experienced heat, but it has generally been a humid heat. When serving as a chaperone on mission trips to New Mexico, I experienced first hand the differences between arid & humid heat. For one thing, in arid heat, your body has a much harder

time cooling down, because it doesn't perspire. For another, and the part that I just couldn't get used to – in arid heat, your mouth remains parched no matter how much water you drink. I felt like I had a permanent wad of cotton stuck in my mouth. I just could not quench my thirst.

Those trips also served a living example of 'being careful what you wish for,' For just two years later, I took a job working in conjunction with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. I would be living and working, in and around more water than ever thought possible and still be considered on land. I'm talking about Hurricane Katrina. Water was all around you – but you couldn't drink it. In fact, my first purchase made on the company credit card was in Shreveport... it was for a semi-truck filled with water for delivery to residents and aid workers alike.

I imagine Jesus could have felt the same way in today's Gospel reading –mouth parched, yearning for a drink, yet knowing that no amount of water would quench his thirst. Only one other time in John's Gospel does Jesus admit that he's thirsty (19:28) when Jesus is hanging on the cross and given a sponge dipped in sour wine. In this passage, though, his thirst is due to the exhaustion of travel. Jesus along with his disciples, has been trekking from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. Along the way, they pass through Samaria. Weary from trudging along those dry, dusty roads of Palestine, Jesus and his entourage stop at the outskirts of Sychar. He sends the disciples into town in search of food. John tells us it's about noon with the sun is high overhead. Ironically enough, it is precisely Jesus' thirst that prompts this midday encounter. I say "ironically" because, as we shall see, it is none other than a thirsty Jesus who offers the gift of living water.

Apparently a woman is thirsty as well. For she too, came to the well in the heat of the day. But John wants us to know she suffers from a much deeper thirst. Jesus perceives her deeper thirst, which is what leads him to say what he does about living water. "Living water" is another one of those phrases that has a double meaning. It can mean fresh or spring-fed water, or it can mean life-giving water. As often happens in John's Gospel, the woman misunderstands and Jesus has to clarify that he means life-giving water. The water he alone can give – to satisfy a deeper thirst. In order to recognize that deeper thirst, we must first peel back the layers of her identity.....

First of all, she is a woman. And not just any woman. She is a woman with a troubled past. Notice I said *troubled* past, not *sinful* past. For much of the church's history, this woman has been portrayed as a prostitute. But this portrayal is based on a common misinterpretation of Jesus' words: "*You have had five husbands, and the one now is not your husband.*" Yet, if we listen more carefully to the text, nowhere does Jesus condemn her history of relationships as sinful. She is not told to repent, nor does Jesus pronounce words of forgiveness. She could have been widowed, abandoned, and divorced - but in those days, quite possible. Moreover, the man she is with currently was most likely

a male relative who had taken her in what was known as a Levirate marriage (where a childless woman is married to her deceased husband's brother in order to produce an heir). If in fact, she remained childless after all those marriages, she would have had the stigma of infertility, and her shame would cause her to go to the well at midday.

As if this wasn't bad enough, she is a Samaritan. Samaritans were members of northern tribes of Israel who dared to inter-marry with Gentiles. In short, as far as Jews were concerned, Samaritans were despised as half-breeds and considered scum of the earth.

Well, a few years ago, the story you just heard –this long gospel lesson – it happened again. Only it happened in a little different way. It was in Detroit, Michigan, right outside the Starbucks Coffee Shop. Jesus was not supposed to be in that city. He was supposed to be on tour in glitzy and affluent places, like Boston and New York. He had taken a strange detour, through one of the tougher places in Detroit. Can you imagine Jesus going through the Detroit area?

All sorts of different people and different cultures live in Detroit area: white, black, Hispanic, and Muslim populations. We all know that Jesus is Jewish. There are lots of strict rules after men speaking with women. It's just not done between strangers.

Jesus was tired. And Jesus was a bit fatigued, maybe a little sleepy. He wanted a cup of coffee. And Jesus made a peculiar request of the woman....

Let's listen in.....

*NANCY: reading greek dictionary...talking to herself about mastering the language to get better jobs*

*LONNIE: allow some time for Nancy to be reading – then enter acting tired whispering.....as sit in chair "Hey, buy me a cup of coffee."*

*NANCY: Looks up & around, but continues reading book*

*LONNIE: a little louder this time....leaning towards Nancy "psst.....Hey there, buy me a cup of coffee."*

*NANCY: quietly, agitated.. "What are you doing talking to me? Don't you know that men are not supposed to talk to women here?" Moves to another chair resumes reading*

*LONNIE: pause after Nancy switches seats. then move to chair next to Nancy*

*NANCY: gets up and buys a cup of coffee & places it in front of you*

*LONNIE: "Woman, if you knew who it was asking you to buy me a cup of coffee, you would be asking me for some living coffee."*

**NANCY:** “Dude, where would you get any coffee? How would you get it? You don’t even have a wallet, and the price of the coffee here in this shop is very expensive! I should know, I just bought you a cup. Where do you get that living coffee? Are you greater than the guy who started this coffee industry? Do you have access to Columbian coffee or Peruvian coffee or Costa Rican coffee or organic Dancing Goats coffee?”

**LONNIE:** *holding up Starbucks cup...* “Whoever drinks this coffee will be tired and sleepy again. But the coffee that I give them point to self.... will be like a well of energy giving them eternal life; they will be awakened from sleep the rest of their life!” *point to cross*

**NANCY:** “Dude, give me some of this living coffee, so I won’t have to come back to this coffee shop ever again!”

**LONNIE:** “Well, go get your husband,”

**NANCY:** *ashamed....* “I do not have a husband,” she replied.

**LONNIE:** *Not chastising, but emphatic* “You are right!” “You have had five husbands, and that guy you are with right with right now is not really your husband, either.

**NANCY:** “You are a man in the know! Our ancestors said we ought to worship in special places, or in Jerusalem, or in Mecca, with our own people. But You say that worshippers ought to go into New York, to one of those big and fancy places like the Cathedral of St. Philip!”

**LONNIE:** “The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship God neither in this city mosque, or in that city cathedral, or in Mecca or in Jerusalem. God is spirit and truth. The true worshippers will worship God in spirit and in truth. It will not matter whether you are from the country or the city. It will not matter whether you are from New York or Detroit or Indonesia or Egypt. It will not matter whether you are Jew, Gentile, or Muslim. It will not matter! Wherever there is spirit and truth, there is the God we worship.”

**NANCY:** *completely startled. Sarcastically* “Well, I know that when the Messiah comes, the Christ, he will teach us all things.”

**LONNIE:** “I am he.... I am he. I am the One you have been waiting for.”

When the disciples came back, they weren’t astonished that Jesus was at the coffee shop. They were not even astonished that Jesus was talking to a woman. The disciples had already tasted a bit of the living coffee of Jesus. That coffee had opened their eyes from sleep before. The disciples knew that Jesus deliberately walks into foreign territory. It does not matter to Jesus where one prays, or what words we use, or even what tradition one claims to follow. What matters to Jesus is spirit and truth.

So what does this all of this tell us about the woman's thirst? It tells us that this woman is a contemptible nobody of culture. She doesn't even have a name. She is thirsting for someone to recognize her plight, acknowledge her as a person of worth, someone to accept her as a beloved child of God. She finds in Jesus, one who alone satisfies this deep thirst with the living water of grace. No wonder she leaves her water jar behind!

That jar represents a past and a present that have left her feeling dry and empty inside. She leaves it all behind and runs to tell everyone about this source of living water that she has found – or actually – found her. And so it is that this troubled nobody of a woman becomes the first witness to Jesus in John's Gospel.

INCRS Amen

**\*CHARGE & BENEDICTION**

*Friends, I have a sneaking suspicion that most of us are not drinking nearly as much grace as we should for our souls to thrive. After all, grace is hard to come by out there in the world. I pray that you have found that grace here – the unconditional love and acceptance that Christ alone can give.....*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you and all  
Amen.