

We are so accustomed to being the recipients of God's gifts that we have a tendency to take them for granted.

Air and water are two resources that are plentiful in our world and we tend to assume that they will always be available.

Last week, we saw the video of celebration in Ghana when fresh water became available through a donated well to the people of that small village.

That image has stayed with me throughout the week.

The children's songs of praise and thanksgiving remind us that we are blessed with the gift of readily available water.

The air, our primary source of life, seems to be in abundant supply.

However, as I sat with Alden in the emergency room on Monday night and watched him labor over every breath, I was aware of the fact that our air supply can become limited at a moment's notice.

Air and water.

God's gifts.

Symbols of life, without which we cannot survive.

Jesus, in our gospel today, uses access to water to empower a young woman to share in the living water of his grace. By talking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus crosses a boundary. By asking for water, he provides an opportunity for her to serve.

By revealing that he knows what is in her heart he exposes his divine nature.

By offering her life-giving gift of the spirit he cleanses her of her sins and welcomes her as a disciple.

By sending her off to the village to share her experience he commissions her to bring others to the well of life.

So where are we in this story?

We can be on either side.

We could be the woman, a person marginalized in society for the choices she has made, aware of the boundaries that are not crossed or we could be the Lord, opening our hearts to those who may be different than us and sharing the gift of our presence with someone who is used to being ignored.

Last year, when I participated in the mission trip to Mexico, one of the lessons that the group leader shared with us was that our greatest gift was our presence.

He said, "These children are starving for attention and recognition. By simply spending time with them, their lives are transformed."

Mother Teresa, who spent a lifetime working with marginalized and rejected people, said “loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.”

“Sometimes being listened to is so much like being loved, it is impossible to tell the difference.”

Jesus, by engaging the Samaritan woman in conversation, acknowledges her presence and asks her for something that she can readily give – a drink of water.

He provides her with an opportunity to serve.

What opportunity has God provided for you lately?

How have you responded?

This Lenten season we have been reflecting on our own ability to serve, strengthening our spiritual selves so that we are strong for the work ahead.

God is calling us to serve and abundantly providing the resources for us to be able to answer that call.

Perhaps it is a simple act of kindness, or a donation to one of the relief efforts.

Maybe you have agreed to serve on a new committee of the church or to volunteer in the community.

Whatever it might be, please don't turn away because of discomfort or unease.

Allow yourself to step beyond the boundaries of your life and be a blessing in someone's life.

The next thing Jesus does in this passage is to reveal himself as the messiah to the Samaritan woman.

This is a curious act, in that he often instructs the disciples to not tell people who he is.

So why does he reveal his true self.

Again, this is an empowering act that shows deep respect for the woman.

When we are courageous enough to let our true nature be seen, the foundation for a relationship of trust and love is laid.

By sharing this important and intimate information with the Samaritan woman he is saying, “I trust you with my life.”

Perhaps you've heard the folktale of Johnny Lingo, a man who lived in the South Pacific. The islanders all spoke highly of him. He was strong, good-looking, and very intelligent. But when it came time for him to find a wife, people shook their heads in disbelief.

The woman Johnny chose was plain, skinny, and walked with her shoulders hunched and her head down. She was very hesitant and shy. She was also a bit older than the other married women in the village, which did nothing for her value.

But this man loved her.

What surprised everyone most was Johnny's offer.

In order to obtain a wife, you paid for her by giving her father cows.

Four to six cows was considered a high price.

The other villagers thought he might pay two or even three cows at the most.

But he gave eight cows for her!! Everyone chuckled about it, since they believed his father-in-law put one over on him. Some thought it was a mistake. Several months after the wedding, a visitor from the United States came to the Islands to trade, and heard the story of Johnny Lingo and his eight-cow wife.

Upon meeting Johnny and his wife the visitor was totally taken aback, since this wasn't a shy, plain, and hesitant woman, but one who was beautiful, poised, and confident. The visitor asked about this transformation, and Johnny Lingo's response was very simple.

"I wanted an eight-cow woman, and when I paid that for her and treated her in that fashion, she began to believe that she was an eight-cow woman. She discovered she was worth more than any other woman in the islands. And what matters most is what a woman thinks of herself."

By accepting the woman at the well, for who she was, just as Johnny Lingo chose his bride, Jesus is demonstrating his capacity for love of every one of God's beloved children.

Jesus didn't care that she had five husbands or was living with a man who was not her husband.

Jesus does not judge.

He offers respect and recognition. He offers love.

How could we do anything less?

Jesus makes an offer of living water. "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

She replies, "Sir, give me this water."

Have you made such a request?

Are you seeking the precious resource that Jesus offers, eternal life?

What is holding you back?

For the Samaritan woman, this is a chance encounter, but for us the offer stands.

All we have to do is ask – "sir, give me this water" and our lives will be transformed.

It's common to think about 'living water' as something we receive.

We focus on our own dryness and thirst, and feel rightly grateful that God comes to us with the offer of gracious refreshment and life.

But, to stop there is to leave the extraordinary message of this passage incomplete, and to allow the Gospel to support what can become little more than selfishness.

As we follow Christ the call this week is to move from being only recipients of living water to givers of it – especially to the poor and the marginalized.

Finally, Jesus sends the woman back to her village to spread the good news of her encounter.

Many come and become believers.

This is what we must do.

We must go back to our villages, our enclaves, our groups of friends and tell them about this living water. We must spread the word that there is something important happening and invite the entire world to join us.

In celebrating this gift of eternal life, we set ourselves apart from those who have not yet come to believe.

By acknowledging that we have the capacity to transform, not just our own lives, but also the lives of others, we identify ourselves as Disciples of Christ.

We are people of value, beloved by God, honored by Jesus Christ.

Let us hold our heads high and joyfully praise the one who offers us living water.

I would like to close with a prayer/poem, *Around the Well* by John van de Laar

Around the well of your grace, O God,
are those who thirst for friendship and love;
Help us to offer them
the living water of community and connectedness;
Around the well of your life, O God,
are those who thirst for joy and safety;
Help us to offer them
the living water of playfulness and protection;
Around the well of your mercy, O God,
are those who thirst for wholeness and peace;
Help us to offer them
the living water of comfort, healing and welcome;
Around the well of your presence, O God,
are those who thirst for meaning and connection;
Help us to offer them
the living water of service and worship;
May the life we have found in you,
be the gift we share
with all who hunger and thirst,
with all who are outcast and rejected,
with all who have too little or too much,
with all who are wounded or ashamed,
and, through us, may this corner of the world overflow
with your living water.
In Jesus' Name
Amen.