

## Third Sunday in Lent

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Vicar Paul Eldred

March 19th, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Has anyone else here been watching the new nature documentary, Planet Earth II? I have. When the first episode premiered a few weeks ago, I turned it on for some background noise and to catch some glimpses of spectacular natural wonders, but before I knew it I was hooked! I couldn't look away! The series has a surprisingly enticing way of bringing to life the dramatic stories that play out in nature all around us – often without our notice. Now the intricate details of the lives of these exotic animals that are scraping out a way of life in beautiful but demanding climates captivate millions of people around the world, myself included. Last week, I was engrossed by the literal life and death struggle for a small family of elephants in Africa's Kalahari Desert as they desperately searched for water. They trudged through the barren and arid landscape hoping that they would find water before it was too late. And just when it seemed that the burning sands would be unending, they find a watering hole full of life. Zebras, antelope, giraffes, ostriches, birds, and more huddle around this small oasis in the desert as they all lapped from this fountain of life. The animals that traveled for miles to find this water source show that even with the diversity of wildlife – four legged or winged, big or small, they all share a common need of water to live.

In a land of abundance like the United States, it can be easy for many of us to forget how important a basic resource like water is and how difficult it is for so many people around the world

to safely drink water. All we have to do is turn on the tap and it's there. Personally, I so rarely think about having to find water that I literally have an app on my phone whose sole purpose is to remind me periodically to drink a glass to make sure I drink enough.

Over 70% of our planet is covered by water. Around 60% of our bodies are water. Civilizations have always been established around water. This city was built at the mouth of the Chicago River on the edge of Lake Michigan. As NASA explores the galaxy, they constantly search for water. And yet, on this planet, nearly 700 million people – one tenth of the global population – lack basic access to clean water.<sup>1</sup> Many of these people must walk for miles to get water that is often dirty. This water shortage kills millions of people a year.<sup>2</sup> And even in this country, the fight continues for the protection of water that sustains many endangered communities from Flint, Michigan to Standing Rock, North Dakota to just down the road in South Chicago. Access to this basic need for life is all too frequently threatened by greed or apathy.

The need for water is central to our scripture lessons today as well. The Israelites are wandering during their forty years in the scorching wilderness – desperately thirsty. The sun beats down on the hot sand as the people see their children and animals wither away. Perhaps they see mirages of water in the distance that they can never reach. They cry out to Moses, begging him for a drink – just a sip of water. Hearing the people's cries, God commands Moses to strike a rock – as bone dry as the desert around it – and suddenly a spring of water gushes forth. God brings forth a watering hole in the wilderness and the Israelites eagerly drink their fill rejoicing in their God.

In John's Gospel, we see Jesus as he travels through Samaria. Now remember that the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along. Thanks to their complicated and intertwined history, these

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<sup>1</sup><http://water.org/water-crisis/water-sanitation-facts/>

<sup>2</sup>[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA\\_World\\_Hunger\\_Video\\_Series\\_Diko\\_Marie's\\_Story\\_Discussion\\_Guide.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA_World_Hunger_Video_Series_Diko_Marie's_Story_Discussion_Guide.pdf)

two groups did not mix well at all. They intentionally did not share many things in common, but they both thirsted for water. And after a long morning of walking, Jesus was sitting in the midday heat at the small stone well in town and was thirsty. But when he comes to this well, he does not have a bucket to pull up the water. The sun is high overhead, but Jesus can't get to the water deep down in that well. Eventually, a woman approaches. A Samaritan woman. A woman with a tragic past. Widowed or divorced five times. Possibly barren.<sup>3</sup> She likely feels ashamed, like an outcast in her own community, so she has come to the well during the hottest time of the day – maybe she just wanted to be alone. But there she finds Jesus who not only speaks to her, quite against the social norms, but he sees and understands her. She gives him the cup of water he has been craving, and he offers her the living water she has been thirsting for. Jesus invites this woman into an understanding that God is with her – and with all people. That God is standing in front of her and loves *her*. Jesus offers this woman the living water that tells her that no matter her past, no matter her ethnicity, no matter her self-doubt, she is loved by God and God has come to her to give her peace and rest. And this woman drinks from this living water and is transformed. She lays down her burdens, her past, her self-doubt, and runs back to town loudly proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah – the Savior of the world.

Just as we all need water to quench our thirst, we also are in need of the living water that Christ offers us. The assurance that we are loved. The presence of God in our lives. The knowledge that the burdens we bear can be laid at Christ's feet so we can go forth rejoicing and proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, the Savior of the world.

Our journey this Lent reminds us of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness and of the Israelites forty years wandering in the desert. Unlike these ancestors, we may have access to drinking water,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=4839>

but I suspect many of us are still searching for something this Lenten season. What are you thirsty for? What do you look for at the well this Lent? Are you thirsty for new life? For healing of bodies – our bodies, bodies of water, bodies of creation? Are you thirsty for justice? For a new world reborn? To be transformed?

You may have noticed that our baptismal font has been dry these past few weeks. The water replaced with rocks that remind us of the dryness of our wandering through the wilderness of Lent.

But in a few weeks at the Great Vigil of Easter, a spring of water will gush up out of the wilderness through our baptismal font as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and baptize a new sibling into the death and eternal life we share in Christ Jesus. She will join with us and all baptized Christians as we live into the living water that we have all been given – the knowledge that we are accepted, loved, and embraced by the God who has come to us through the waters of Christ. That the well of Christ’s living water is deep and available to all. We will all remember our baptisms and the invitation to live into that living water, to be transformed in identity we share, so we can go forth from this place, free of our burdens and our doubts and proclaim Jesus as the Christ who has brought us into his own eternal life.

*Jesus, source of living water, may we drink of you and live!<sup>4</sup>*

Come and drink from the water!

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<sup>4</sup> “As the Deer Runs to the River” (ELW 331)