

October 1, 2017 – Life-giving Water

Exodus 17:1-7

I grew up on farm in Southern Ontario at a time when hay bales were small and rectangular in shape. In the summer, when the hay was baled and ready, everyone in our family helped to get it in the barn as fast as possible.

Usually I worked in the haymow. In Ontario, they built two-story barns with hip roofs so you could pile the hay up past the rafters. When the haymow was nearly finished and the summer sun was beating down on that metal roof ...it was hot. The mow felt like a dark, dusty, oven and the sweat just poured down your body.

When the hay wagon was empty and all the bales were in place, all I could think about was water. The farmhouse, with its shiny taps and clean glasses, was only a minute or two away; but I couldn't wait. I climbed down the wooden ladder to the floor of the barn. I took the rubber hose that was used to fill the trough for the sheep. I turned on the tap and I let that water pour into my mouth and down my chin. Who knew where that rubber hose had been? But, at that moment thirst overpowered any thought of cleanliness, any fear of disease.

Have you ever been really thirsty?

What a question to ask at the end of a summer in which this city received less than an inch of rain from the beginning of July to the end of September.

http://climate.weather.gc.ca/climate_data/daily_data_e.html?StationID=48976

We are surrounded by farm and ranch land that is totally parched, land that is begging for water. This year's harvest is nearly over, but our farmers know that significant rain and snow are needed in order to replenish the soil so next year's seeds will germinate and grow. Many of our lawns are brown and many of our crop yields are down.

But have you ever been really thirsty?

The truth is that we need water for life. 50-60% of our body weight is water and doctors tell us that the average woman needs to drink about 8 glasses of water a day. Last spring our congregation responded to a request for funds because countries in Africa were facing a severe drought and people were dying from lack of food and water. Water is life, without water there is no life. And yet we continue to pollute our lakes and streams and we allow corporations to turn this source of life into a commodity, a commodity that is packaged in plastic and sold for profit. Most of us have never really been thirsty but many other people on this planet are not so lucky.

In today's scripture passage the Israelites had been travelling through a barren desert. They were now camped at a place with no drinking water. Like people in Africa today, they really were thirsty. So the Israelites complained to their leader,

Moses. And Moses pleaded with God. According to the story, YHWH responded by telling Moses to go to a particular rock and to strike it with his staff. Moses did as God commanded and pure, clean water poured out of the rock for the Israelites to drink.

Wow, if it could only be that easy. When I first arrived as a student minister in Saskatchewan it was the fall of 2003 and my pastoral charge was experiencing a drought that had already lasted for three years. Every slough was dry, and the dust was blowing. The first thing I told them was, "I'm not a rainmaker. Don't ask me to pray, and I definitely don't dance, for rain." I don't pretend to have any control over water or the weather. Meteorologists will tell you it is hard enough to predict the amount of precipitation that we will receive, let alone trying to control it.

There are no easy answers for problems like unending drought, polluted lakes and bottled water. It will take work, hard work and determination to educate and to transform ourselves. It will take work, hard work and determination to change how we treat our planet. It will take work, hard work and determination for us to heal the many ways that we have already damaged our environment. And even then there will still be drought and there will still be some who need our help, people who are really thirsty.

But the good news is that we don't have to do this work of transforming and healing the earth by ourselves. The good news is that we are part of a caring

faith community that celebrates the presence of God. The good news is that this sacred presence, this Holy Spirit, this essence of love is the living water that gives us birth. Yes, we have a lot of work to do to change ourselves and to heal our planet, but we are not alone.

So today, as we celebrate the sacrament of communion, as we share bread for the journey and the cup of blessing, let us take this time of remembrance, this time of community, this time of connection to “Drink deep this source of life. Drink deep and know.” As we sang earlier today, “living water sings and living water brings the love that makes our spirit grow.” (MV 87 Water Flowing from the Mountains)

We need this opportunity for growth, this connection with the sacred in order to do the work of healing our planet. Water is essential for life. Today, we all have drinking water available in our water fountains and/ or flowing from our taps. But what legacy are we leaving for the generations that follow? How will our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, our great nieces and nephews, answer when they are asked,

“Have you ever been really thirsty?”