

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last week, we considered the wind. Cannot see it...but, nevertheless, the wind is all around us, all the time...and we all know what the wind is, sight unseen.

So, in our focus to close up our distance from God...the gap that **we** put there...we paused to consider this past week how the very act of breathing...those countless, short involuntary movements of air in and out of our lungs...is an absolutely critical mass of our being. The spirit of God. The very breath of life: moving in, and out, and through us...each and every single moment of our lives.

This past week, we were asked to contemplate that. To consider it. To meditate upon it. All to open ourselves during this Lenten season to the very proximity of God. That proximity...the very closeness...the complete intimacy of God with us...is the key to our moving from a “head” faith of Christianity as having belief in the existence of God, to a “heart” centered Christianity of living into who we were created and are called to be.

Moving from “head” belief to “heart” centered living is a tough transition, to be sure. Even with the best of intentions, many do make that transition to start a journey of a life of living within faith. I know..it took me 50 years...and, now, I think I know what Jesus means when he talked about the narrow door.

When, and how, and to what extent are we each going to begin to comprehend what it means for all of humanity to be created by God to be in the very image of God?

Well, for me to tell it, it all really seems quite simple. We just want to make it hard for ourselves, because we do not see ourselves in the way that God sees us.

It is like this. God is in the very elements necessary for life itself. The very air we breathe that we talked about last week, and the water that we examine today. What is the human body? 90-some percent water? We can...and to some extent should..fast during Lent. But if we stop breathing, guess what? We stop breathing!

Moving our readings into the imagery of water, it is no different. If we take no water for a few days, we are done! It is no wonder that water takes on sacred significance in arid Palestine and parched Egypt.

OK now...by a show of hands...how many here will admit to being old enough to remember the long-running Coca Cola advertising phrase of “The Pause that Refreshes”? “The Pause that Refreshes”. In a hard working day, everybody...even Santa at Christmas time...takes a break for a Coke. Hot..sweaty...worn out. Then, here it comes. Icy cold. Carbonated bubbles almost burning in pleasure passing down your throat.

Don't we have that in our readings today?

In Exodus, the Hebrews, who are led out of Egypt by the long-suffering Moses, had crossed into the wilderness of the Sinai on their way to their new life in the promised land. And, what are they doing? They are surprisingly ungrateful for their liberation from slavery to take up a life of freedom in covenant with God. Over and over they complain because they are no longer in the safety and comfort of their Egyptian homes. Their freedom is a burden, not a blessing. Like spoiled children, they demand proof over and over that God is with them and will supply their every want.

The liberation itself is not enough proof of a compassionate God...nor the manna which has fed them or the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud which have guided them. They are so stubborn and narrow-minded that nothing less than a continual round of miracles will satisfy them. Today's reading is the latest in the long list of demands the Hebrews make of God, as if miracles are nothing more than their due. An entitlement. So, surrounded by the un-belief of the people, in the midst of a desert wilderness, Moses strikes the rock and fresh water pours forth to satisfy their needs.

The pause that refreshes.

Are we any different? Like them, we have not yet entered our promised land. Like them, we are surrounded, even in our exile, by countless miracles. Like them, we need to ask if we are so spoiled by the comfort of our slavery to our never-ending wants, so poor in spirit, that we cannot move forward with faith and trust in the abundant empowerment by God. Like them, we are guilty of the same laziness and ingratitude. We ask why God allows war, yet we will not learn to curb our own anger or to hold our tongue from the hostile word. We ask why God allows starvation and disease, yet we will not change our own lifestyles to contribute toward the production of God's creation. Is it time we stop "waiting on God" and start acting in faithful response to the gifts from God?

The image of water in the desert, pouring from the rock to satisfy the need of the people, is not just an ancient miracle. But also a statement from God that God wishes us overflowing and new life out of the barrenness of our present existence. Like Moses, we have the power to uncover that miraculous spring. The only difference between Moses and the people of Israel was that Moses believed God's promise and was willing to lift his staff and strike the rock. It was not that Moses was capable where the people were not, but rather that Moses was **willing** where the people were not.

And as for Jesus? He stops at the water well where the Samaritan woman awaits...and together they both find "the pause that refreshes". Exhausted from his journey into Samaria, Jesus pauses for refreshment by Jacob's well by getting a drink of water. It is also clear from the story that the unnamed Samaritan woman receives refreshment as well...but of another kind. The "living water" of the Spirit that Jesus points to...and, as a result, her story of evangelism among the other Samaritan villagers is most commonly preached.

But I want us to consider this gospel story down a deeper level. Go deeper into the well, so to speak.

There is no obvious miracle here, as in the Exodus story. Yet the Samaritan woman gets her spiritual refreshment. And just as importantly, she shares it with the rest of the village. In fact, her initial testimony is so personal, that they come and find out for themselves...taking their refreshment so much to heart that it becomes theirs as well, without reliance upon her.

But, what about Jesus? Is his “pause that refreshes” limited to a drink of water?

We ponder the attitude that Jesus seems to share with the Samaritan woman when he first encounters her. Look at it again closely. Do you hear a tone in his voice as he addresses her? He demands a drink, and her reply gracefully interprets it as a request. He also initially notes the traditional superiority of the “pure” Jewish faith over that of the Samaritans, saying “you worship what you do not know; we worship from what we know, for salvation is from the Jews”.

But she understands her spirituality more than he perceives. She admits she seeks for the Messiah and, upon believing that Jesus is the one, she goes off and proclaims to others. Even though Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with each other, Jesus was led to this place and this encounter. Imagine why? Did God show Jesus at the well that his ministry extends to all humanity, and not just to Jews as the “right ones? Was the Samaritan woman, and this story continued in this gospel, the initial spark of a world-wide movement toward the greater gift of salvation? Was this a continuation of his journey in the wilderness?

Why not? All persons need to drink. What is the point?

The water that God offers the people of Israel through the staff of Moses upon the rock is a miracle because it affirms the promise from God that life can emerge even in a place of death. But the water that Jesus shared with the Samaritan woman, and she with him in return, is that the very life that God promises us is already with us. The “pause that refreshes” is not only in that place of death, but everywhere....and in every one, if we but let it happen.

We cannot hide from God. God is in us, and part of each one of us...even the Samaritans among us. That narrow door to the kingdom of heaven is reserved for those few who give up trying to control God within them, instead of the other way around. It is all about dropping the resistance to who is at the very core of our being, our presence. Let it go, and move on to the “pause that refreshes”. Move on to the joy of living into who you are meant to be, all within the glory...and peace...and love of God who we continue to see in the image of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.