

Unfulfilled

Exodus 17:1-7

By

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To the extent possible, effort has been made to preserve the quality of the spoken word in this written adaptation.

Where there is water, there is life!

Near the Canadian border in northern Minnesota is Lake Vermillion. Surrounded mostly by federal and state lands, it is a wilderness area used primarily for hunting and fishing. My in-laws have a ninety-nine year lease on a piece of property there with a small hunting cabin. The cabin has all the essentials but none of the amenities of life. In the kitchen there is a pump at the sink rather than a faucet. When packing for the 5 hour drive to the cabin, it is critical to remember to bring a one gallon jug of water in order to prime the pump. The pump itself has leathers that have to be wet in order to create a seal that allows the pump to suck the water up from under the ground into the cabin. Once the water begins pumping, the first thing you do is replace the water in the gallon jug used to prime the pump so when you let the pump down, you can prime it the next time you need water.

It used to be commonly known how to prime a pump but it is knowledge that is mostly unnecessary for those of us who have always just turned the faucet for water. You need water to get water. It would be a great mistake to drink or use the water you have in the jug for priming the pump because then you would be unable to access the ground water, where there is plenty to be had. The challenge is learning how to access the reservoir under the surface, and using what you have to obtain what you need. There is a similar expression from the agricultural world captures the idea, “Don’t eat your seed corn!”

The spiritual life like our physical lives requires regular consumption. Last week we recalled that ‘we do not live by bread alone.’ This week we remember that life can sometimes become a thirsty affair as we make our way through the spiritual desert.

Around the world, people gather where there is water. Great cities are built where rivers converge because there is fresh water that can sustain human life and can be used for energy and commerce. There is plenty of water in the world. The problem is that 97% of it is salt water in the oceans. Only 3% is fresh water, and 2/3 of that is in the form of ice, in glaciers and at the polar ice caps. Most of what is left is groundwater, not surface water that fills our rivers and streams. Of the fresh water that is used globally, 70% goes to agricultural use, according to a United Nations report.

The Presbyterian Church and the San Gabriel Presbytery in particular have sponsored a program called "Living Waters for the World" which provides water purification systems based upon simple technology that will allow communities in the developing world to obtain safe water. A team from this Presbytery installed two such filtration systems in Peru this year.

5,000 children die each day as a result of water-borne diseases that cause diarrhea. That roughly calculates to one death every 20 seconds. In the developing world, women and girls walk 6 kilometers per day to fetch water on average. It is estimated that half the global diseases can be prevented by improved water supplies. Oil has been the major resource over which countries have competed for the last century. For the next century, it may be safe water. We have in our own congregation an engineer who knows more about water than anyone I know – John Morris.

There are growing issues and concerns with respect to water in the world. In Northern California, dams on the Klamath River may be removed to allow salmon to swim up stream for spawning. It is not just human life that depends upon water and water management. As important as stewardship of this important earth's resource is, I'm primarily interested this morning in that which quenches the thirst within our souls.

Of course, over 3,000 years ago during the Exodus, no one knew all that we know today about water. But they did know, where there is water there is life! The hot wind of the desert scorched the earth where vegetation dried up as soon as it broke ground. With parched lips, in despair and human extremity, they voiced their complaints to Moses. No oasis in sight and every mirage seen in the heat waves rising from the desert proved to be in their imaginations, until life itself seemed to hang in the balance. Find water or suffer the consequences and risk the end of life itself. Under God's direction, Moses struck the rock three times, priming the pump. Despair is washed away as that cool, clear, refreshing water gushes forth and rolls through the camp of Israel. As mothers and fathers carry water to their thirsty children and the elderly gathered and shared experiences around the spring, a community was transformed by the presence of fresh water -- dying of thirst and on the verge of mutiny when just under the surface there was plenty to quench their thirst.

Few of us have ever despaired for lack of water or life's essentials like food. But we have known what it is to be in despair and to thirst for something within we cannot find. Perhaps you have heard a diagnosis in a doctor's office that brought your world crashing in. Maybe you received a "pink slip" or heard from a boss that you were being "let go." Possibly you received a visit from the police with news of an accident, or a phone call with the news of the death of someone so close to you that you still can't imagine living without them. As devastating as it can be to face things beyond our control, it can be even more devastating to experience pain when it is within someone's control. A spouse's unfaithfulness, a child's estrangement, a parent's disapproving rejection can leave one so starved for love, so hopeless about the future, so devastated that life itself seems no longer conceivable, no longer worth the effort. We may not know the thirst of those in the desert, but we know scarcity! We know emptiness! We know thirst! We know what it is to be unfulfilled and to thirst for that which refreshes, restores, and cleanses, carrying away the impurities of life and

bringing new possibilities and hope. Where will we turn when our lives are at the point of extremity and in need of life giving waters? That is the question this text places before us.

Jesus once met a woman at a well. She was not a church-going woman. She may have walked 6 kilometers to draw water from the well but she did it in the heat of the day because she was one of those people who are ignored in polite society. Rather than be ignored or an object of scorn, she preferred just to be alone. "Give me a drink" Jesus asked her. To which she replied, "How is it that you, a Jew, can ask a drink of me?" And Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you 'Give me a drink' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. . . those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty . . . because the water I give will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."¹

The physical life and the spiritual life are inter-connected, according to the Bible. The problem is not so much that the world in which we live can be such a thirsty place or we regularly require drink, but we must learn to access the ground waters and to trust in God. We need to follow God's direction to find the springs. And that demands that we first stop drilling where there is no living water to be found. Too many of us expect the stuff of life to quench our deepest thirst. It cannot. We must learn how to prime the pump with the little we know about the spiritual life in order to access the living waters under the surface of things, just beyond our perception.

If the Spirit of God has ceased to flow in your life and your soul is bone-dry this morning, and all your effort seems only to aggravate your own emptiness, when all your spiritual endeavors seem to simply pump air, it may be you just need to prime the pump. Jesus Christ has promised to be within us as a well of water, springing up

¹ John 4

in everlasting life. But the release of his spirit awaits the your release to him. Put your life in Christ's hands and you will receive salvation. Put your faith in him and you will come to know his faithfulness. Place your treasure in him and you will know true riches. Give yourself to him because he gave himself for you and the water he gives will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life within you.

Last week it was manna and this week it is water. One step at a time, one act of obedience, one faithful response after another, and the people of God discover where to find what nourishes and sustains human life. May the Lord help you find what you are looking for today in the deepest part of your soul, where you may be unfulfilled and still bone-dry.

There is a spiritual law at work. "The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."² The ancient ways of priming the pump begins with reading the Scriptures, and praying to the Lord, and sharing what you have received. As we begin our annual stewardship campaign this month, you may want to consider what you are willing to give to plumb a steady source of that which is needed for life and life abundant. Thanks be to God, for giving us living waters! Amen

² Corinthians 9:6