

DIVINATION STICK

Scene one..... from the Exodus passage:

In a HOT, very hot and dry desert,..... the Israelites are on their journey away from captivity. Moses was leading them out of Egypt.... to freedom.

The people are obsessed with how hot and dry it is and how parched their throats are. I imagine some are walking around with “Y” shaped sticks.... hoping against common sense that they will find water by using “those divination sticks”. The process is sometimes called “dowsing”, and there are some folks who say it works?????

But,..... no water is found and Israelites are starting to panic, and their panic turns into rage. They argue. Many demand to return to slavery just for a drink of water, and they turn their anguish to Moses. With chapped lips they scream out to Moses, “GIVE US WATER TO DRINK!”

Moses is thirsty, too, and is frustrated and fed up with their limited memory and faith.

The Israelites’ faith is as deep as How they are feeling at that moment.

They apparently forgot about the past: the slavery and what God had done for them. They were focussed on the NOW.

And, we thought we were the only culture that is controlled by the lust for instant gratification.

Unable to connect yesterday’s blessings to today’s needs and God’s promise for tomorrow, they cry out in anger to Moses.

Moses had a notorious short fuse, which had launched him into precarious situations in the past, including murder.

After showing his irritation to the crowd about their protesting, Moses storms at God, crying out “What shall I do with these people; they just don’t get it?”

God gives Moses some good counselling advice for anger management by telling him to go Hit something inanimate.

God told Moses, “Remember that big stick you used at the Nile? Well,..... with a few leaders, go on ahead of the crowd, and take that stick and smack it on a rock,..... and you’ll discover water, too.” “Also, know that I’ll be there with you.”

Moses responded, “No problem; I loved to hit that rock... any rock.”

Moses believed God,..... and I think he found the process rather gratifying.

I imagine he laid into that rock like a spike driver laying railroad tracks.

And,..... water came forth out of the rock,.... and the Israelites were embarrassed by their limited thinking.....as they drank the water.

Scene change / scene two:

It’s high noon; it’s hot and dry and thirst is an issue.....

Okay, I guess that wasn't much of a scene change; however, it is a millennium later.

It's the heat of the day, Jesus has walked a long way, crossing through Samaria, and he's thirsty. He came to the famous well of Jacob, exhausted and parched, and sits down next to it. Apparently, he has nothing for which to draw water, and so he sits and waits in expectation. When SURPRISE... a Samaritan woman comes to the well to get some water. Jesus lived in his culture; he knew the cultural rules and expectations, even the cultural prejudices. So, he knew what it meant for a woman to come at midday to draw water. The average, respectable woman would only get water during the cool of the morning or evening. The woman was someone who was not allowed to mingle with "acceptable" people. Her midday excursion meant big red flags – meaning this is a woman to avoid,..... plus, there was the obvious fact that she was a Samaritan, and all good, conscientious Jews would never talk to a Samaritan woman,Never! And, this woman knew the "conditions" / the situation, and likely thought of herself as invisible to all, but her own.

It's fascinating how people can become invisible and forgotten. And, if the marginalised invisible are seen, then they're given enough assistance to make them disappear. If they dare to speak out, well then... they're put down ; they must be made invisible again,..... so that they can not be seen ...and thus ignored.

The woman being at the well where Jesus was sitting did NOT produce an awkward moment. Jesus was fine with the moment, and the woman thought she was invisible. She knew that Jews couldn't mingle with Samaritans because it caused them ritual contamination. It was as if Samaritans emitted toxic radiation.

The story could have ended here with Jesus ignoring the woman, and no one would have thought a thing about it. He could have found a bucket or something ... somewhere to get water. And, the incident would have never been recorded in John. But, it was written down. The Bible often hits us like Moses striking the rock. Moreover, the entire encounter is an example of "living water".... or.. in the words of our Lent theme: how to be fully human as God created us to be.

Instead of ignoring the woman, Jesus treats her as an equal and humbly asked her **to meet his need**. Being vulnerable, Jesus looks to an outcast, to the least and powerless for help. This surprising contradiction to conventional wisdom is much like hitting a rock and getting water.

The woman was astonished to be seen, to be heard..... to be "empowered". To the request for help from this travelling Jew, she asks the obvious question, "WHY?" Why are you treating me this way?

Jesus responds by telling her about living water. There is more to this pericope, including the wonderfully gentle way Jesus accepted her and allowed her to share her own story: her outpouring. Not only did Jesus receive water, but he also received a human made in the image of God. The woman gave and she received, too.

She received grace and she received “living water.”

Living water is a way of being. It is God’s way.

Living water!

Living water flows. It is alive because it moves. It takes in and gives out

Water that only receives becomes dead like the Dead Sea.

Water that only gives / lets go... drains and dries up.

Water that neither gives or takes, but keeps to itself, becomes stagnant and foul.

Water that flows: the gives and receive freely is alive!!!

Flowing water is fresh and vibrant.,..... it is the same with Love / with relationships... and with life.

It is love.

Jesus called it living water, but he could have called it love.

Jesus was talking and demonstrating God’s way of being—of freely, openly giving and receiving, without hindrance, without fear, without prejudice, without hoarding and without pride.

Living water is just another way of explaining how God intended life to be.

Anyone who farms or gardens knows this process that is called photosynthesis in the biological realm.

Plants take in carbon dioxide, and with the help of the sun and water they turn it into organic compounds and give off oxygen.

The plant grows, and yes it takes from the earth, but it eventually returns to the earth,.... and the cycle continues.

This cycle of life / the dynamic of living water can be seen in almost all aspects of creation, including in our relationships.

Communities, neighbours, friends and partners experience a vibrant and healthy relationship when giving and receiving flows freely.

And, this is a world wide dynamic, too.

When some take in more than they give, then things get ugly and sour.

And keep in mind, there is more to life than money.

Being as God intended,.... as living water.... is comprehensive and all inclusive. There are infinite ways of giving and receiving.

Cultures / people are happiest when they live in a balanced society, yet... ... for many sad reasons, we impede the flow / barriers are put up / some become spiritually dead by taking in more than they give out / some waste away / and some become stagnant.....

/// AND, humanity become less than human... because we ceased to be as living water.

A relationship between two people loses its vitality when there is not enough giving and receiving done with equal regard and respect.

The same is true with any relationship, including with God.

Not receiving doesn't necessary mean no one is giving. There are people who refuse to be humble / who are uncomfortable receiving.

No matter the reason, when the flow is hindered then things can get out of balance, ugly.... and rotten.

This same principle applies to how we interact with the environment.

For many reason, including, fear, greed and ignorance we have been in a destructive pattern of taking much more from the environment than we give. And, exhausting toxins and excess CO2 is not giving back; it is really draining more life from our ecosystem.

And, things are getting ugly and rotten.... and, as Paul expressed it, "Creation is groaning" – groaning for redemption / groaning for a return to wholeness, balance as God intended.

Creation is dying of thirst,..... and we are in that desert.

And not only is our corrupt pattern hurting nature, but it is also making our souls desperately thirsty.

As we approach another election, most people will cry out, "What can you give me? ... I need more / I want more",and thus the process of dying is enhanced as the spiritual salinity increases.

The balance / the cycle of life is not really about a mandate to give or the need to receive, but rather about being open to giving and receiving.

It is an issue of faith and trust that comes from love.

As I suggested, "living water" is merely another way of saying Love!

When we love God and love our neighbours as our self, then we are drinking living water.

Jesus was thirsty and asked to receive water, and he gave respect and compassion. And as it happened, from a surprising and extremely unorthodox source, he received water... and the delight of fellowship.

The Samaritan woman went to the well to receive water, and instead she gave water as she received respect, compassion and grace..... AND.. the invitation to accept living water.

Life can be very interesting and fulfilling when we are flowing in God's love / when we are open to all the possibilities that come our way.

Moses didn't use a "divination stick" to find water. He simply responded with hopeful expectation to God's leading.

We may be surprised by what or who quenches our thirst, and it may come from the least expected sources.

God was on the rock with Moses. God was with Jesus. So, if we look for God in all things and in all people, including the environment, then we will not thirst for long, nor will others.

God is in the flow of life, but.... sometimes.... we are not.