

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the forty-first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱ

“... But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. ... When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.ⁱⁱⁱ

“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar [**SIGH-karr**], near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to

drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith [SETH] the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith [SETH] to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith [SETH] unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Developement:

Water is truly necessary for life. All the doctors tell us so. We must have air, water, food and shelter to live. And in terms of our Earthly life that is so. Our physical bodies require these things. Our spiritual selves also have needs.

In today’s readings, Jesus makes an amazing claim. He offers a drink that satisfies permanently. He tells us, “*Drink of the water I give you and you will never thirst again.*” It seems contrary to all we know. Surely water runs out. Surely we need to drink again and again.

The power of this illustration should not be misunderstood. In the Middle East there are in many places deserts and a great need of water. The value of a well that continues to give good clean water is impossible to overestimate.

Wells tended to be used by entire communities for many years. This particular well where Jesus sat was known as “Jacob’s Well”—a point of high honor.

But it was not the usual combination of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen to which Jesus referred. He uses the image of water—so important to the people in that day and time—to make a point about His ministry and gifts.

As He sat by an ancient well and spoke with the Samaritan woman, Jesus was telling her about spiritual refreshment. He was speaking about the grace of the Holy Spirit—which only He can give.

Later, in John 7:39, this is clearer: *“But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

In the well was water, good water. The Samaritans liked to claim that it was given to them by Jacob. It had for many years provided them with water for their refreshment, for cooking and cleaning, and for their crops and animals. It was very valuable to them.

But the benefits of this physical kind of water are temporary. Bodily thirst is assuaged, but it returns. Heat may be dissipated, but it too comes back. And so the people had to come back to the well for water again and again.

This is something the woman assuredly knew from her own experience. Yet, Jesus points it out to make the distinction: *“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.”* Things of the world are like that. They may satisfy for a time, but that time will be limited.

The refreshment to which Jesus referred does not have that kind of limitation on it. Jesus instead offers what He calls “living water” or “the water of life”. He spoke to the Samaritan woman of living water than can refresh one’s body and one’s soul. He means a spiritual water of life, or a water of spiritual life, that can sustain us not just now—but to eternity.

That living water is the grace, pardon and love of God. It is eternal life in peace. And the most amazing part of this promise is that all she—or we—need to do is ask. What did Jesus tell the woman? *“If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”*

But the promise is not limited to this woman to whom Jesus was speaking only. *“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”*

If you drink of the living water that Jesus offers, you will never again thirst. You will have eternal grace, eternal peace, eternal life. You will then have the well of living water inside yourself.

There is more. No longer thirsting, as Jesus says, includes leaving behind all those things that the prior state included. Sinful lusts, desires for evil things, temptations will be ended. The inner grace of the living water will so far exceed any of those things as to remove them from the life of those who drink of it.

This well of water springing up into eternal life is the faith that sustains, because the grace, love and peace of Jesus Christ becomes part of us after we drink of it. As He says, *“whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.”*

In drinking of the living water of God, the soul is satisfied, because it is the beginning of a never-ending fountain of spiritual refreshment. It will be a fountain of religion and faith that cannot fail. As Jesus says, it will be springing up into everlasting life. It is therefore, not just the

refreshment for the course of this life, but into everlasting life. It lasts beyond the confines of our physical selves and stays with us.

No matter the circumstances, no matter the problems we face, no matter what challenges there may be—we have this wellspring of living water within us to sustain, strengthen and refresh us.

And what do we do with this wellspring of living water?

It sustains us, yes, but do we hoard it, shelter it, hide it away in our most secret places? Do we like the timid one afraid of the thief pretend we do not have it?

No! We must share it. We must encourage others to come to drink of the living water too. As each one of us was once brought to Jesus to share in His living water, so we must bring others.

We need not fear that our water will run out. It is not like the natural well or spring that will eventually go dry. We have Jesus' own word that the wellspring that sustains us is eternal and unchanging.

Nor need we have any fear that the living water is bad. The Grace of God is not corruptible. It gives life, and never disease or death.

We certainly need not fear that, in bringing others to Jesus to share in the living water, we will lose our own. "*Whosoever drinks of this shall never thirst...*" There is no limit to God's love.

Let us pray. Lord, who alone can give us the eternal blessing of living water, help us to share your gift. Give us the words, the spirit, the grace to share with others the wonders of Your Love, and to bring them to You, so that they too can experience the wellspring of eternal life. Let us never be timid hiders of Your truth, but joyful proclaimers. This we ask in Jesus' Name. Amen.

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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xiv (PECUSA 1928, 1943).*

ⁱⁱ *Isaiah 41: 8-10, 17-29 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. John 4: 1-14 (KJV).*

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