

6 Easter Acts 16:9-15 Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5 John 5:1-9
Christ and Grace May 26, 2019
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It's Memorial Day weekend and the summer exodus to the water has begun. Whether it's a beach, river, lake, pool, or the hose in the backyard, summer means heat and the waters call out to us. Water is essential for life. At creation, when the earth was a formless void, a wind from God swept over the waters. Water was there before anything else. Both lessons and our Gospel reading today contain water, underscoring its importance spiritually as well as physically. Jesus affirmed the importance of water when he said, "and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."¹

Lydia must have recognized the importance of water; that's where she went to pray, and it's where the community gathered under her leadership. What was Lydia praying about when Paul found her there? Certainly, she did not know the new course her life would take when she went down to the river to pray on that particular day. But the Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. And then she went into the waters of baptism, into the river of life.

In John's Gospel there was a man who was blind, or lame or paralyzed, we aren't sure. How many times in 38 years do you imagine he tried to get into the pool? Surely, he never imagined that on that day he would stand again, see the future and walk right into it.

The passage in Revelation reveals the new heaven and the new earth. Are we surprised that in it there will be water? The river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Because water brings growth and healing.

As we near the end of this Easter season, the readings invite us to remember that God moves, intercedes, provides, and transforms. The river of life flows between heaven and earth. It sometimes troubles the waters to make a way for healing, it creates places of prayer for people inside and outside of the gates, and even inside churches at baptismal fonts. You never know when you will encounter the Spirit moving over the waters. You never know when you will be the one to provide much needed water of life to one of God's beloved.

This past week I had a number of encounters with people who called or came to the church seeking the water of the river of life. Maybe it was the heat, or perhaps just because it's the end of the month, but people needed help with rent, utilities, food – they were struggling because there was more month than money. The unusual number of calls gave me reason to really think about the needs of God's people.

It's never easy to weigh the request to help someone who is truly in need with our concern that we may be enabling a problem. We do have some "regulars" that we know work the system and

¹ Matthew 10:42 NRSV

we will give them a cup of ice water or a piece of candy, or use of the restroom. But there are also those who reach out to us for whom the struggle is real.

We have Wal Mart gift cards to give them, although they never last long and we are almost out of them. I have a discretionary fund but it doesn't take too many gifts of assistance to deplete it. My prayer is that we will help feed a child, or provide supplies for daily living or electricity for the elderly living on fixed incomes. Often people have no insurance and when there are unexpected medical costs, they cannot make ends meet. They long for the river of the water of life, for the pool of healing water.

Last Sunday a guest at our Celtic Service came to the reception after worshiping with us. Disheveled and colorful with tattoos, he stood out as someone who did not usually attend this service. He got a plate of food and I listened to his story. After a heart attack and triple bypass surgery he could no longer keep up the pace at his former job as an auto glass installer. With medical bills and no income he became homeless. He's living in his truck and finding odd jobs.

He told me that someone had given him some cash to put gas in his truck, and he apologized to me for being dirty and smelly. He did not ask me for money; he asked me if I knew where he could get a shower. I took his phone number and told him I would call him Tuesday morning. You see, we have a shower downstairs and it's never used. So this week our Celtic guest came and had a long, hot shower – the river of the water of life, the pool by the sheep gate, the place of prayer by the river. I cannot begin to describe the joy of this man, washed clean, healed in spirit, restored of dignity.

The wind, the Spirit of God, is always sweeping over the waters, today the river of life may flow around you with cleansing power, or it may flow through you to bring healing to someone else. Either way, you will be given a story to share of an unexpected encounter with Jesus.

Notice that Jesus doesn't dwell on the paralyzed man's past, he doesn't say anything about what's been done or left undone for 38 years. And notice that he doesn't heal the man on the man's terms – by helping him into the pool when the angel stirs the water, as has always been done in the past. He simply tells him to get up and walk. The river of the water of life is for everyone. Jesus wants each of us to be made well, to walk again, to be delivered from the paralysis of our past, our baggage, our fear, our complacency. When he asks, "Do you want to be made well?" He wants to hear us say "Yes!"

We have been washed in the waters of baptism, dying and rising with Christ, and we are sent to tell the story of Jesus, the story of salvation. We have a vision of God with us; not only in the future but also right now. The river of the water of life, the healing pool, looks like, testifying to Lydia by the river, healing the man long dismissed by the pool, feeding the hungry with Wal Mart gift cards, paying power bills for the elderly, and offering showers to the homeless that they too can be clean.

This summer, whenever you find yourself beside, on, or in the water, remember the way the Spirit of God swept over the waters at creation, remember how the Lord opened Lydia's heart to listen to Paul beside the river, remember that Jesus healed the man by the pool when he didn't

think he had a chance. Finally, remember your baptism when you were washed in the water of new life. May the Spirit open your heart to listen, may the water refresh you, and may you go and pour out some of that healing water on someone who needs it. Amen.

With thanks to Jill Duffield for inspiration for this sermon

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[2019/?fbclid=IwAR0uE_NPKrQNntcYEIkdUyqxJtaDSKStdidusqXacMkSo3Pn1X2J-8gvEZc](https://pres-outlook.org/2019/05/6th-sunday-of-easter-may-26-2019/?fbclid=IwAR0uE_NPKrQNntcYEIkdUyqxJtaDSKStdidusqXacMkSo3Pn1X2J-8gvEZc)