

6th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

26 June 2016

The Rev. Dr. Brian C. Wyatt, Pastor

John 4:5-42

As many of you know (because you were here helping!), this past week was Vacation Bible School, and our theme was Living Waters for the World. If you weren't aware, our church is part of the Synod of the Living Waters, which encompasses all the Presbyterian Churches (USA) in Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The biggest project we undertake together as a synod is called "Living Waters for the World," and installs solar

powered water filtration systems all around the world to help provide clean and safe water for communities.

- Two installed in Tazewell under the support of Colonial Heights Presbyterian in Kingsport and First Presbyterian in Bristol

- One in the Speedwell community supported by First Presbyterian in Morristown, and another in Roan Mountain, supported by Magill Memorial Presbyterian Church

- There are also

ones in Cookeville,
Sneedville, Wartburg

- And there are fifteen in homes on Viking Mountain supported by Reedy Creek and Cedar Creek Presbyterian Churches.

1.8 billion people lack access to safe water. That is about 1 out of every 4 people. If those of us gathered here this morning were representative of the world around us, roughly 8 of us in here would not have access to safe water to drink, brush our teeth, wash our bodies, clothes, and dishes. And because we live in a rural area, this stood out to me—82% of those who lack safe water live in rural areas.

Since our worship service started this morning, 20 children have died from a water related disease. If you've been here since Sunday school, that number is closer to 70 children. That's just this morning.

And as sobering as those numbers are, if we as a global population don't change the way we use water, the amount of safe water available could drop by 40% in just 15 more years.

It is hard to encapsulate all that water means to us. Clean water is a vital necessity to sustain our lives. When water is dirty or polluted it causes disease and death. We can drown in

water if not prepared to be out of its way.

Think of how often we deal with too much or too little rainfall in our country. Floods and droughts are both devastating to people and to our food supply.

Water is not only necessary for life, but is near universally a spiritual force or symbol across all cultures. We are born in water. We require water to live. We are mostly water in physical content. Most creation narratives, including Genesis, have water at or near the beginning. Genesis 1:2 reads “darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”

God’s breath separated the land from the water.

Then there is the Great Flood as God covers all the wickedness with water and starts over again. Moses strikes a rock in the wilderness to provide water for the Israelites. We are baptized in water, and the baptismal language in the Bible speaks of water as both death **and** new life.

And in our story today, we encounter Jesus, hot and tired from a long journey, pausing by a well (with historic religious significance). Wells are particularly important in arid countries like Judea and Samaria. They are scarce and

valued. They become gathering places, places for social contact.

This Samaritan woman probably comes to the well at midday, the noon sun, to avoid contact with her neighbors. We soon find out why. (She's been married five times! And her current partner is not her husband!) And there are lots of directions we can go with this story, but water is a pretty central theme here.

There are at least twenty references to water: drinking it, thirsting for it, wells that hold it.

When Jesus arrives at the well, he asks this unnamed Samaritan woman for a drink of

water. Jesus astounds her with his reference to "living water." But "living water" has more than one meaning in this context. The most common use of the term was to refer to running water (rather than still or stagnant water). Living water was moving water—a river or a stream.

But Jesus has come to a well. And a well didn't hold "living" water. So the woman at first thinks that Jesus is insulting her Samaritan sacred well, belonging by legend to their common ancestor, Jacob.

But there are two kinds of water referenced interchangeably here. And **both** are essential

to our life. The first is clean drinking water. Without it you cannot survive. You cannot live.

But the second is living water, spiritual water, which gives us abundant life. Jesus seems to love ambivalence in his rhetoric, challenging people to really stop and think about what he's saying.

In this case, I think he's inviting the woman, as us as well, to remember that we need both kinds of water for life: earthly living water and heavenly living water. Neglecting either one is to our own detriment.

Which is why it is so ironic that Jesus is asking the woman for a drink. Isn't he the

source of living water?

Except that God needs us just as we need God.

Jesus asks the woman for an act of compassion, for an act of justice. Beginning to recognize that Jesus represents the Holy One, she asks him for "his water," the living water, "so that I may never be thirsty."

It is only then that Jesus brings up what God already knows—the secret sins and life we try to hide. Jesus assures the woman that he has come "in spirit and in truth."

This well, once considered sacred, is now especially holy ground. God meets us where we are and gives us opportunities to

drink from the spring of eternal life.

But it doesn't stop with us taking a drink of living water. God challenges us to offer that living water to others.

Remember in Matthew 25 when the disciples ask Jesus, "Lord, when did we see *you* thirsty and give *you* something to drink?" And he answered them, "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these, you have done it to me."

Jesus lives today, lives among the least of these in Brazil, Honduras, Ghana, Nicaragua, Mexico, Haiti, Belize, Sudan, El Salvador, and right here in Tennessee,

right down the road from us. And through their voices, Jesus asks of us, "Give me a drink." We are called to respond to in a tangible way.

The motto of Living Waters for the World is: "Jesus Christ is living water for our bodies and our souls."

Although we deserve it no more than the woman at the well, Jesus freely gives us that living water, the water of eternal life. And in grateful response, we can offer to Jesus and to those whom he loves the clean water so necessary to a healthy life for all God's children everywhere.

Thanks be to God. Amen.