

THIRST
Randall Tremba
March 19, 2017
Third Sunday in Lent
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Exodus 17:1-7

The Israelites journeyed through the wilderness and camped at Rephidim. But there was no water there. The people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us, our children and animals with thirst? Is God in this place or not?"

John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan village. He was tired from his journey and sat down by the village well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." And she said, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God and if you knew who it is that says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked, and he would have given you living water." "But sir," she said, "you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get such living water?"

Good question. What is living water and where do you get it?

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This past Sunday after the screening of "Out of Order" a woman tapped me on the shoulder and said: *I bet you're surprised to see me here.* I wasn't until she mentioned it.

The film portrayed the struggle of several young people seeking ordination within the Presbyterian Church. It told the story of John Stanger, a gay man raised on a Texas ranch. It told the story of Mieke Vandersall, a lesbian woman. And it told the story of Alex McNeil, a transgender person. Alex was present for the screening and fielded questions with great wit, wisdom and humor.

Each one portrayed in the film had felt a call to ministry at a young age. All were raised in the Presbyterian Church and loved it dearly. But at that time the church disallowed LGBT persons to be ordained as deacons, ruling elders or ministers.

Still those young people persisted and persevered while the larger church debated and debated and debated and debated. As we know, that ban was finally removed and soon after the Presbyterian Church went on to redefine marriage, no longer as "between a man and a woman" but rather "between two persons."

Change eventually came. But the journey was long and painful. You know, like the wilderness when we ask ourselves: "Is God in this place or not?" Or, "Is God in this church, or not?"

In the wilderness we hunger for bread and thirst for water and at times feel as though we will die. The wilderness is daunting. And yet grace abounds. Manna is found along the path and water gushes out of rocks.

Who saw that coming?

And now back to the woman who tapped me on the shoulder. *I bet you're surprised to see me*, she said. I wasn't until she mentioned it.

That woman had left here 15 or so years ago after the Rev. Pat Donohoe invoked a feminine name for God in her benediction. That did it for that woman, a self-proclaimed traditionalist deeply displeased with our embrace of inclusive language for God and our acceptance of homosexuality.

Now that you mention it, I said to her, *I am surprised. What prompted you to come?*

Her eyes welled up with tears as she said: *My grandchild is transitioning. I love him and I want to understand and support him.*

Who saw that coming?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, said Jesus. They shall be satisfied.

That woman now thirsts for knowledge and understanding like never before. I put my arm around her and offered my blessing. I offered a blessing because I understand how hard it is to find our way through the wilderness where nothing is easy and nothing is certain.

I also offered my blessing because Paula's and my godchild is on such a journey, which means the parents, our dearest California friends, are on a journey too. Their son Josiah's announcement that he was now Molly shook them to the core.

Who saw that coming?

How can you raise a child for 30 years and not know who they really are and who they want to be? Molly's parents thirst for understanding, thirst for the living waters of love on their wilderness journey. Paula and I hold their hand while they hold Molly's.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, said Jesus. No, it's not the thirst for justice as in revenge. It's the thirst for justice as in fairness and equality of opportunity. One bread, one body, one heart, one love for all.

Once upon a time Jesus met a Samaritan woman at the village well at high noon. By all accounts she was a loser five times over. But Jesus saw through the scars, the shame and labels. Jesus saw a person. Jesus saw a woman, a beautiful and beloved child of God.

True, it was no place for a Jewish man to be or to be seen. But Jesus spoke to her and she spoke back. It was not something Samaritan women did.

Who saw that coming?

Samaritans and Jews kept their distance. Gentiles and Jews. Each regarded the other as infidels, despicable and deplorable. Fear and racial arrogance kept them apart.

That's the way the world was then. And it's still the way of the world. Walls. Barriers. Bans. Racial arrogance and mountains of ignorance and bigotry.

But love sees through it all. Love hungers and thirsts for a just, fair and kind world—one conversation, one child, one grandchild, one godchild at a time.

A Jewish man and a Samaritan woman tapped into a well of “living water,” which is to say, into the “well of love.” It’s what faith and perseverance does even when there’s no water in sight.

There are many transitions in life. Affirming and expressing our true gender is one. Getting from fear to courage is another. And getting from complacency to compassion is yet another. In the end it’s about finding a way to express who we truly are as beloved children of God.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. It’s true: we can’t live without bread and water. But if that is all we hunger and thirst for, we never will be fully human.

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Hymn 530
“One Bread, One Body”