

SERMON – “Come, Refresh Us” - Feb. 24, 2008
Text: John 4:5-42 & Exodus 17:1-5

Do you remember a time when you were really thirsty? A time when you yearned to feel the moisture on your lips and then swallow that heavenly water to quench your thirst? Both scriptures this morning tell us about a people experiencing thirst. The Old Testament story is about a people in the desert, with no water. Without water survival was not possible. It looked like this people would die from thirst before they even got to their destined promised land. In the Gospel lesson today we have people pictured in another desert, a desert of separation from the gift of life, God. They are separated in a variety ways. In each of these separation their souls thirst for God's living refreshing presence. Their experience is expressed well in Psalm 42, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My souls thirst for God for the living God.” I would like to lift these desserts up for us to examine in our personal and corporate lives. At the end of each dessert I will say Lord Jesus Christ, and you respond with the sermon title, “Come Refresh Us.”

The first dessert is the one of sin. Sin limits who we are and how we live. Our sin and all the energy spent in covering up and running away from sin leads to a yearning for life. It is a yearning for authenticity. Being able to live as God wants you to and as God created you to be. When in this dessert of Sin, there is deep yearning to be happy with ones self and live in this contentment. The place that the Israelites are lost in and in fear of dying of thirst is literally in the Dessert of

Sin. It is here in this place that they learn to trust their God who saves them, leads them, and provide for their lives.

In our Gospel lesson we have another dessert of sin. This is what keeps the woman in isolation. Her sin may be possibly why she is alone coming to the well. The sin is what keeps her separated from who she truly is, a woman alive in the grace of God. Notice she had a lot of questions for Jesus that Jesus calmly answers. It is through her questions that Jesus taps into her thirst of water that would refresh her life. She requests this water, "Sir give me this water to drink."

Then Jesus confronts her with her sin. Go call you husband and come back. She then confesses that she doesn't have a formal husband. In fact she had five so-called husband relationships that weren't really marriages. It was sexual but no covenant was exchanged in their relationship. This was not the life that God wanted for her. This life was causing her great thirst. Gently confronting was the way toward water. Jesus did not stand before her to judge her, but to free her and give waters of loving grace that would allow her to be herself, and to live in community with others and her God.

What sins, imperfections do we try to hide, or cover up hoping others will not recognize? Jesus is standing right now before us. What would he say to you that is true and only you and he may know? Maybe it's being a pleaser and accommodator in which you deny who you are? Maybe it is a past act that you can't forgive yourself? Maybe it's a chronic behavior that you just can't stop no matter how hard you have tried? Maybe it's seeing yourself less than God see's

you? What would Jesus be saying to you right now that prevents you from being the man or woman that God yearns for you to be. (silence) .

Lord Jesus, **Come, refresh us.**

Another dessert that keeps us from bring who we are and it gets in the way we worship, is community conflict over things that really are not that important. The conflict we have before us in the story between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman is disagreement about where God resides in the temple in Jerusalem or elsewhere? Where can people go to truly worship God? This is the first of all worship wars.

Today we put so much energy around worship styles that I think we miss the point of who we worship. Do we worship the spirit and truth of God or do we worship preferred styles? Through fighting over praise song or hymns, or singing responses or saying them, of having bulletin's or a screen, we can find ourselves in the dessert of separation form each other and from God. We think we control when God comes into worship through our actions. The truth is God will appear where people worship sincerely in truth and spirit. It has nothing to do with style. To think we can control God through our limited understanding then we limit our faith and ourselves and we find ourselves thirsty.

What do you focus on in worship? What you prefer or what bothers you in worship, or the truth and spirit of God? (silence) .

Lord Jesus, **Come, refresh us.**

The third dessert is the one of law. The disciples are caught in the fulfillment of the law and old cultural boundaries. These cultural boundaries and ancient purity laws limit them and their witness. They have put following the law before witnessing to people who are thirsting for God's grace. For them the cultural boundaries were Samaritans. Jews where intermarried with others after they were taken over by Babylonians. They were seen as unclean, impure, people to have not contact with because they would make you unclean. Samaritans worshipped elsewhere because they were not welcomed in Jerusalem. These were people to keep separated from.

The disciples went into town to buy food for Jesus that would not be contaminated by the Samaritans uncleanliness. They are so focused in keeping ritually clean and separated they miss the ripe harvest of God's kingdom that is right before them.

We can still be in the dessert of law and cultural boundaries. We feel more comfortable to be with our own and with people who think like we do, believe like we do, and worship like we do. We too become blind to what God is presenting to us to witness to. South King County is very diverse. Recently the Kent School District Superintendent spoke to the Kent Ministerial Association. She informed us that there are now 172 languages spoken in the Kent School District. If we are going to reach out for God's kingdom in Kent we have to learn others ways of doing things and seeing situations. Let me share one story that the Kent School district has had to learn to do in order to reach out and educate all the diverse children in Kent.

In their out-door education camp programs, no matter how hard they tried, by personally inviting, and offering to pick up the children and take them home, children from different cultures did not come to the outdoor education camping week. After about three years of trying but being unsuccessful in attracting diverse children to come to camp, they decided to ask the parents of children from different cultures why. The answer was our society in the United States is one of the very few that camp has a positive meaning. In most other cultures camp refers to refugee camps, to or political arrest camps, like concentration camps. No wonder none of the parents of children from different cultures would let them come to the out door education camp experience. Once the school district understood the cultural meaning behind camp they could try to educate what it means in our society. The result is that more children from different cultures are now participating in the outdoor education camping experience.

How do we limit God's work through our cultural biases? What traditions or points of view limit who we are as human beings and limit the rich interaction we can have with all of God's people, and God's justice on this earth which lead to ourselves and others to be thirsty? (silence) .

Lord Jesus, **Come, refresh us.**

Let us open ourselves to Christ's presence. Let us drink of his grace that forgives our sins, helps us let go what is not important so we can worship in the spirit and truth of God, that opens us up to experience God in unfamiliar places

and situations, so that we will go and declare our story to others and point the way to Christ. Close with

Sinking Wells by Janet Morely

Come to the waters
All you who are thirsty;
Children who need water
Free from diseases,
Woman who need respite
From labor and searching,
Plants that need moisture
Rooted near the bedrock,
Find here a living spring.
O God, may we thirst
For your waters of justice,
And learn to deny no one
The water of life.