

March 19

Missing Water & Words

Recently, I participated in a devotional meditation at Cornell called “The Public Reading of Scripture,” which comes from an admonition from St. Paul to the young pastor Timothy. (I Timothy 4:13) The arrangement at the event was that leaders would read an introductory context to either the Old Testament lesson or the Gospel lesson. Then a recording of Scripture would be played.

The context I was given to present would precede a recorded reading from the book of Numbers, specifically the account of Moses calling forth water from the rock. After receiving the invitation and the context paragraphs assigned to me, I asked whether I was also to read the Scripture passage aloud. No, that would be a dramatic recording. I was thinking maybe, ahead of time, I should at least read the chapters they said would be on the recording. But I did not. If I had, I would have spoken of an important omission.

After the first 18 minutes or so of the dramatic recording, including about 5 minutes hearing from Numbers 19 about all sorts of sacred uses of water, the recording ended. There was no mention of Moses and his speaking to the rock. Recall that in the account in Numbers 20 Moses struck the rock – not following the Lord’s parameters to only speak to the rock so that water would flow. Between the emphasis on sacred washing and the absence of the water from the rock story I really “thirsted” for that climactic miraculous story of the Word creating a miracle of water flowing from the rock in a waterless desert! It was like expecting cake and getting a very dry crust of bread.

In the New Testament book John, chapter 7, Jesus has been in Jerusalem during the final sacred festival of the year, the Feast of Tabernacles. The feast included a daily “water ritual.” A procession would descend to southern Jerusalem, take up a large container of water from the pool located beyond the city walls. The vessel was then carried back up to the temple courts, where water was poured out in front of the crowds, an act symbolic of God’s miraculous provision of water during the wilderness journey. (Think Moses and the rock.) On the last feast day, the large water container was “poured out” – but this time *there was no water!* Why? Seeing an empty jar reminded the Jewish people that God had taken them safely through wilderness wanderings for 40 years, provided for them, and when they arrived in the promised land, they had all the water they needed!

At that precise moment, as the empty jar was revealed, Jesus stood and yelled to the crowds, **“If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.”** (John 7:37) His timing was amazing as *He boldly declared that He was the water of life missing from their lives.* Moreover, He continued to say that the water coming from Him would give them an everlasting supply of life, actually flowing from the Holy Spirit!

Think about the times that we do not speak up about Christ – The Water of Life. Think of the times that we don’t live out our baptismal identity as the Holy Spirit, given by water and Word, directs us to do. Think about the time that we don’t take to read Scripture. Often, we don’t follow through. But think about Christ as flowing/living water. Always available through His Word; longing to have us fill the pew with open ears, and kneel at the rail with an open mouth and heart! Nothing is missing from that picture, except us when we don’t trust Him and heed His Word, **“If any man is thirsty come to Me!”**

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, please help us take seriously Your actions and claims to be the Water of Life, the Word of Life. Help us take seriously our Baptism and the Word of God which truly provide joys of forgiveness and life, here and eternally! Help us drink deeply and speak up about You! Amen.*