

*"Gatorade for the Soul"*

*Psalm 95; Exodus 17:1-7; John 4:5-42*

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*Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut*

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Have you ever been thirsty? Who hasn't? But I mean *thirsty*, like your whole body crying out; the feeling that you could drink a swimming pool? Perhaps some great physical activity or hot summer travel has left you parched. Perhaps some of you Scouts, now and in times gone by, have known the thirst that accompanies camping when a water source is limited. Sometimes disaster or malfunction cut us off from reliable water, as the victims of last year's hurricanes know all too well. That kind of thirst the Israelites experienced as we heard in the Exodus reading. When we encounter it we, like them, sometimes grumble.

Gatorade is a sports drink that touts itself better than water because it restores not only fluid but vital nutrients lost during dehydration. As neither physician nor scientist I cannot vouch for that, but only it has certainly been a welcome libation for me from time to time after various exertions.

But perhaps your thirst goes deeper than the physical. Perhaps it is a thirst of the soul. Your faith, once fresh and vibrant, green and growing like a spring plant, is dry and brittle against the cold and snow of a winter of the spirit. You just go through the motions but your heart is no longer in it. Maybe you and God aren't even on speaking terms, and the well that used to be full and running over is dry.

Perhaps your thirst is for a relationship that nurtures instead of drains. Maybe you are in a relationship that has gone dry, and you turn on the tap and get the sound of air coming out. Maybe ardor has ebbed, and there is a lot of sand between you and the one you love and you wonder "Who moved?"

Maybe your thirst is for health: healing from cancer, from chronic pain or depression, from addiction. You thirst for relief, for a cure, for answers, for anything that will give you back life.

Maybe your thirst is for meaningful employment or any employment. Where you do you go? What do you train, or retrain, for? *These kinds of thirst need Gatorade for the Soul.*

The woman we meet in the Gospel today is that thirsty. She is so thirsty she comes to draw water in the heat of the day. That is the evidence of her physical thirst. The evidence of her spiritual thirst is also there. Women of the first century would normally draw water in the cool of the early morning or early evening, and in groups. She comes at high noon, alone. She is at best isolated from her own community. Perhaps she is even a prostitute.

We should not rush so quickly to judge this woman, with the moral glasses of our own time so firmly in place. We may be right in thinking that any woman who has had five husbands and is now living in a common law relationship has some issues to deal with. But the issues may not be those we think.

In that day, women had few rights, especially within marriage. All was weighted in a husband's favor. If she failed to please him, or produce an heir, or if he suddenly desired his freedom, all he had to do was say three times, "I divorce you" and she would lose her home, her family, her belongings, her status, her place at the well. As catastrophic as this might be to happen once, it has happened five times. Used and cast aside. Security found and taken away. We are not told, either, whether her husbands died and left her a widow or whether they divorced her, but either way the pain...well, who could describe it? And her current relationship is not exactly kosher.

Do not flatter ourselves that such things no longer happen.

These women, and this Samaritan woman, and men and women here today, know all about this thirst of the soul!

Having arrived at Jacob's well to fill her water pot, she meets another man, and a Jewish man at that. "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans" the gospel writer mildly observes. In fact, Jews and Samaritans hated each other, with passion and reasons not unlike today's Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Samaritan woman steels herself. Maybe if she doesn't make eye contact she can get her water and go home. Maybe he'll ignore her. Besides, he has nothing to draw water with and anything she has will be culturally unclean to him.

But this man speaks to her, asking her for a drink. So they begin the verbal sparring, she focused on physical thirst and the cultural divide between them, he upon the living water that wells up from within to keep us from ever being thirsty again. Is she so focused on the physical as to deny the spiritual? Or has she been hurt so many times, by so many men, that she cannot dare to let this man get under her skin, and cannot dare to let this man inspire a hope that has been dashed so many times before?

Yet she does hope. She keeps talking to Jesus, perhaps as much out of curiosity as out of thirst for human friendship. No matter. In her brokenness she keeps the conversation going, and finds a man who, as she says, "told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

After all, the last place she expected to find Messiah was in a Jewish man.

Isn't that the way of it, when we find love or love finds us? Not just romantic love, though that, too; but deeper love, that purpose in life, the quenching of the thirst of the soul. It often comes in times and place and from sources we least expect, like the gift it is rather than the entitlement we expect. It is being open

to the encounter of the moment, despite our preconceived notions; and the pieces begin to fall into place and something deep inside of us goes “ahhh!” And someone high in heaven whispers “Ahhh!” and the angels gather around the throne of God shout, “Ahhh!”

Jesus does that. His presence, his love, his life assuages our deepest thirst, as a “Gatorade for the Soul.” I can tell you how but I cannot tell you how.

Yes, he crosses over gender lines and ethnic hurdles.

Yes, he crosses over cultural barriers and religious divides.

Yes, he crosses over social taboos and economic walls.

Yes, he crosses over our defenses to transform us and renew us.

Yes, he crosses over judgment to give grace and strength.

Yes, he crosses over pain and fear to give relief and courage.

Yes, he crosses over us, our sin and shame, to make us the Church, his body on earth.

Yes, he crosses over the rubble of our lives to walk with us into a new tomorrow.

Yes, his spirit is there, bubbling within us like a hidden spring, waiting to burst forth in a gush of living water.

I cannot tell you how. I only know it is so, that I have come to know it through you and the people of Christ before you with whom my life has had the privilege of journeying. I only know that it is so by knowing Christ, who crosses over by giving himself fully and completely on the cross, there to show the depth and length and height and breadth of his love for our redemption.

Drink, drink of this Savior and his relationship of hope and salvation. Amen and amen.

*and making him known*