

May 21, 2017 "Carry the Water"

(5th Sunday of Easter) (Mother's Day)

John 7:37-44; Acts 8:26-40

Whether a well, a pool, or a river, the Living Water God offers shouldn't just be consumed: it must be shared. It must be carried.

From the admonition at the end of Matthew, the parting waters of the Red Sea, the Baptism of Jesus, the baptisms in the book of Acts, to the billions baptized since, water is not just a symbol. Water really does mean life, a new life.

But we must be honest with ourselves about what we've done with this legacy, good and bad. While we haven't passed on our heritage of belief and faith like we could have, we can certainly say that we stand on the great foundations laid for us by our forebears. And while their dreams for what we might be may not have come to fruition, who we are now in Christ is just as powerful a legacy.



And so what do we do now? How do we allow ourselves to be wells of living water? How do we open up to the possibilities the life of Christ presents to us? How do we answer the call of God in our time to make disciples for the time coming after us?

John 7:37-44

37 On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted,

“All who are thirsty should come to me!

38 All who believe in me should drink!

As the scriptures said concerning me,^[a]

Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.”

39 Jesus said this concerning the Spirit. Those who believed in him would soon receive the Spirit, but they hadn’t experienced the Spirit yet since Jesus hadn’t yet been glorified.

40 When some in the crowd heard these words, they said, “This man is truly the prophet.” **41** Others said, “He’s the Christ.” But others said, “The Christ can’t come from Galilee, can he?” **42** Didn’t the scripture say that the Christ comes from David’s family and from Bethlehem, David’s village?” **43** So the crowd was divided over Jesus. **44** Some wanted to arrest him, but no one grabbed him.

Footnotes:

John 7:38 Or “Whoever is thirsty should come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, just as the scriptures said, rivers of living water will flow out from within them.”

- Observe the footnote for v.38. It gives a dramatically different meaning than the text chosen. Which do you think is right?
- Does the explanation for what Jesus said in v.39 clear things up for you?
- Why would Christ’s identity be a cause for division?
- What do you think the idiom “living water” means?

Acts 8:26-40

26 An angel from the Lord spoke to Philip, “At noon, take^[a] the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.) **27** So he did. Meanwhile, an Ethiopian man was on his way home from Jerusalem, where he had come to worship. He was a eunuch and an official responsible for the entire treasury of Candace. (Candace is the title given to the Ethiopian queen.) **28** He was reading the prophet Isaiah while sitting in his carriage. **29** The Spirit told Philip, “Approach this carriage and stay with it.”

30 Running up to the carriage, Philip heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you really understand what you are reading?”

31 The man replied, “Without someone to guide me, how could I?” Then he invited Philip to climb up



and sit with him. **32** This was the passage of scripture he was reading:

Like a sheep
he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer
is silent
so he didn't open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation
justice was taken away from him.

Who can tell the story
of his descendants
since his life was taken
from the earth?^[b]

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, about whom does the prophet say this? Is he talking about himself or someone else?" **35** Starting with that passage, Philip proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him. **36** As they went down the road, they came to some water.

The eunuch said, "Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?"^[c] **38** He ordered that the carriage halt. Both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water,

where Philip baptized him. **39** When they came up out of the water, the Lord's Spirit suddenly took Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. **40** Philip found himself in Azotus. He traveled through that area, preaching the good news in all the cities until he reached Caesarea.

Footnotes:

Acts 8:26 Or "travel south along"

Acts 8:33 Isa 53:7-8

Acts 8:36 Critical editions of the Gk New Testament do not include 8:37 Philip said to him, "If you believe with all your heart, you can be." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son."

Footnotes:

Acts 7:56 Or "Son of Man"

- If John 7:39 is taken seriously, how many references to "water" take place in this story and where? How do the instances of water function?
- Who started this encounter? Who finished it? Who directed it?
- Given the dates verse 8:37 started showing up in manuscripts, it seems clear that it was a later addition to the original text. Why do you think someone thought it was important to add? Should it be included or not?
- What kind of life do you think Phillip really had?

Commentary on John passage by David Lose

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/
preaching.aspx?
commentary_id=1923](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1923)

There is simply no getting around it: this is a very challenging passage on several fronts.

First, it reveals John's Gospel as, in many ways, a defensive document. If biblical scholars are right, the author of the Fourth Gospel likely wrote this story of Jesus to bolster the confidence of a community of Jewish Christians that had been expelled from the synagogue....

In this seventh chapter, we sense the conflict rising between Jesus and his opponents. The debate, which turns on things that may seem ridiculous to us -- Jesus' hometown, for starters -- was likely a topic of serious contention between those Jews who rejected Jesus (along with those who followed him) and those who believed he was God's Messiah. Essentially, the tug-of-war between these two sides boils down to who interpreted Scripture correctly, and the author of this Gospel is defending Jesus against charges that he could not have been the Messiah.

Second, John's Gospel has been used throughout the centuries to justify anti-Semitism. Because those who followed Jesus and those who opposed him are all Jewish, it is

something of a historical anachronism to call the whole of the Gospel anti-Jewish (let alone anti-Semitic), and yet if we deny how it has served those who have despised and persecuted the children of Israel we are indulging in a dangerous kind of denial.

For instance, the repeated reports in this chapter and the next (though not in this particular passage) that Jesus' opponents were out to kill him has led too many Christians over the years to label Jews "Christ-killers." For this reason, anytime we tread anywhere near such passages we need to exercise great care.

Finally, this is one of the narrative lessons that, while perhaps helpful in connecting previous sections with later ones, has no keen theological edge waiting for us to exploit. What then, might we say?

Three possibilities present themselves. First, it is helpful to remember that the division we sense behind the scenes of John's account is occasioned by a sibling rivalry -- a community once joined in their synagogue worship is later divided by differences over whether Jesus is the messiah. As is often the case, sibling rivalries and familial conflicts can be quite painful, and so it is here. Religion still divides families.

A generation or two ago it may have been the prospect of a Protestant

marrying a Roman Catholic. Today, perhaps it is a Christian marrying a Jew or Buddhist or, more likely, marrying someone who professes no faith at all. When we struggle with our emotions regarding such unions, we may take some comfort in the fact that such conflict is not new, while we also strive to avoid characterizing those who differ from us in the stark terms of the Fourth Evangelist. (It is helpful to keep in mind that when John's Gospel was written, Christians likely were the minority and felt themselves to be oppressed. Everything changes when Christians come into power and feel justified to persecute those who once opposed them.)

Second, whether the characterization of Jesus' opponents is historically accurate or fair, there is no question that the scenario of rushing to judgment is still commonplace. The great mistake of the characters in this story who oppose Jesus is that they will entertain no counter-evidence.

Having convinced themselves that Jesus is their opponent, they curse the crowds who believe in him, ridicule the police who are impressed by him, and intimidate Nicodemus who speaks up for him. Are we not also tempted to brook no arguments that do not support our hopes or biases? How might we, as a community, become a place where we reserve judgment, make space



Even the most stubborn stone must succumb to water. A canyon is cut by waters that refuse to give up.

for dialogue, and welcome those who are different from us?

Third, the great issue in John's Gospel is belief. To believe in Jesus is to be made a child of God and heir to grace (see chapter 1). To not believe in Jesus is to sin (a theme that will be more pronounced in next week's reading). Belief in Jesus, in this account -- and understandably given the history of John's community -- is everything. But notice that when Jesus speaks in this chapter he does not hold faith up as either the criteria for inclusion or standard of judgment.

Rather, he invites all who are thirsty to come and drink from the living water that is the Spirit who will guide Jesus'

disciples into faith and all truth. Belief, as it turns out, is a gift. The Spirit, as Jesus said in the last scene featuring Nicodemus (chapter 3), blows where it will. Hence, when we meet persons who believe differently than we, or profess not to believe at all, perhaps the most fitting response is to welcome them as children of God anyway, praying to, and trusting in, the Spirit of Christ who grants faith in a way that is beyond our comprehension.

Yes, this is a challenging passage. But perhaps it is also a passage that can serve as an example -- both negative and positive -- for those of us who also live during a time of religious rivalry and the clash between faith and disbelief.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

"In John, 'thirst' has the double meaning of literal thirst for real water and physical life; and 'spiritual' thirst for a real relationship with God and eternal life. Thus, those who come to Jesus and trust him will have floods of life flowing out of them."

–David Ewart

Sermon on Acts passage by Peter Lockhart

<http://revplockhart.blogspot.com.au/2015/04/of-eunuchs-and-hope.html>

I love the question that Philip asks the Ethiopian Eunuch,

"Do you understand what you are reading?"

It's a great question. It is a confronting question.

"Do you get it? Can you make a connection between what you are reading and your own life?"

I think it is the kind of question that is constantly before us; not simply when we read the Bible but when we engage with any reading or have experience from which we can learn. For so often we read or experience something and we don't learn, we don't listen, we just keep on doing things the same old way.

So the question for us today is "Do we get it?"

I mean, do we understand why this story is in the Bible at all?

And even if we do, how does that relate to who we are and where we are going?

If we travelled back into those first early years of the Church there must have been hundreds, even thousands, of stories about people coming to faith. What's so important about this one? Why is it included and why at this point of Luke's recounting of the Acts of the Apostles? What was Luke trying to tell the early Christians? And of course even more importantly "What's in it for me and for you?"...

So let's set the scene. Jesus has ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on the

disciples. The apostles had begun their ministry in Jerusalem; sharing the story of Jesus with anyone who would listen and performing many miracles.

Despite their enthusiasm the reception they received was mixed to say the least. In the previous Chapter of Acts we hear of the stoning of Stephen by the Jewish leaders, whilst the beginning of Chapter 8 speaks of the persecution of the first Christians in Jerusalem.

They scattered and Philip went proclaiming the good news in the city of Samaria, with great success. From here an angel of the Lord directs Philip to head out on the road, the road that ran between Gaza and Jerusalem and it is here our story takes place.

As Philip travels along the road along comes a carriage containing an Ethiopian Eunuch returning from worshipping at the Temple. Now in terms of why this story is included at this point I suspect some of it has to do with the witness to God's faithfulness.

The path had been a rocky one for the apostles in Jerusalem but God had promised to build the Church to the ends of the earth and whilst Philip had some success in Samaria the character of the Eunuch adds another dimension. God reaches out through Philip and, as we shall see,

the Eunuch responds and is baptised.

Now eunuchs did have a place within the people of God, despite being mutilated and having restricted access to the Temple.

As well as being a Eunuch this guy was a Diaspora Jew, which basically means a Jew who had been living outside of Israel. The Jews had been dispersed in the 6th century BC after the Babylonians had conquered the Israelites. As a Jew this Eunuch must have been quite faithful as well, not only visiting the Temple but reading the scroll of Isaiah on his journey home.

He was also a man of power and of wealth. He was a court official of the Queen of Ethiopia, in charge of her entire treasury. The fact that he could read and that he had a scroll are clear indicators of his position.

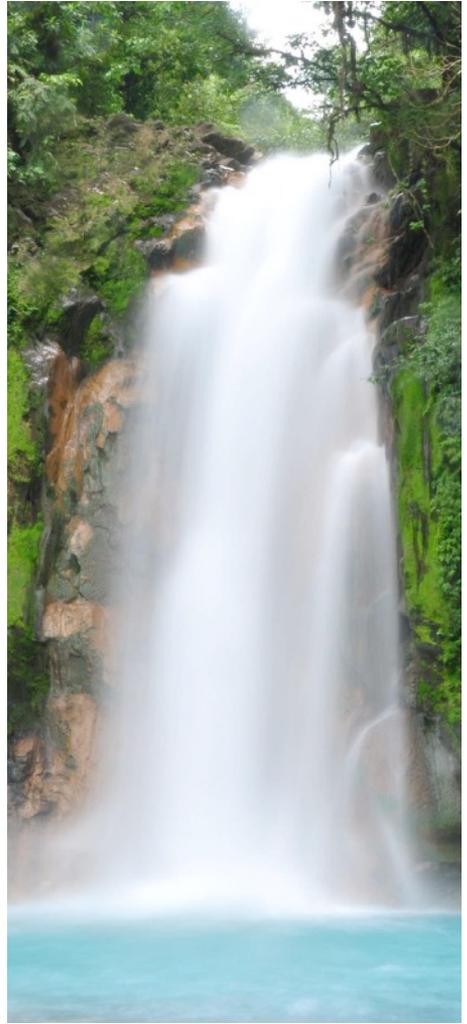
So Philip gets a prompt to approach the carriage and the scene becomes somewhat comical as he runs along beside the carriage and strikes up the conversation.

What is interesting here is that the Ethiopian recognises Philip has something to offer in terms of bring some light to the scriptures and invites him into the carriage alongside him.

After some discussion around the Isaiah passage and Philip's explanation of whom Jesus was the

Eunuch sees some water and exclaims, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptised?"

I have little doubt that Luke records this question especially because this is a loaded question. What is to prevent anyone from being



baptised? Can wealth, race, sexual status, piety, understanding and so on and so forth? The good news is for all and all are invited to share in the fullness of life with God and each other!

This is part of the essence of the good news in Jesus God breaks down barriers to include all people in God's family. The response of the eunuch to the message is automatic - baptise me! God is at work!

The story was recorded because it was meant to inspire hope that the message of Jesus was going forth into the world as promised, even in the face of persecution and difficulties.

And we can find hope from this as well for our story connects with the same God who spoke in the desert to Philip and through him to the Ethiopian Eunuch.

It is hope that we experience in our story as a community of faith in the face of our own adversities. Let me give you a concrete example of this hope. It would be easy for us as a congregation to look around Sunday by Sunday and be despondent - too many empty pews, too many elderly faces, not enough energy. Yet to focus on these things is to forget God's faithfulness to us as God's people - new members who have joined and come to commitment in recent years; new opportunities in

ministry opening up; new relationships emerging through our university relationships. God's faithfulness is ever present to us....

It is hope that we can see in our own lives and our own encounters with God in others. Take a few moments to reflect on the last few days and consider where have you seen acts of kindness, where have you come to understanding or seen others being enlightened, where have you see reconciliation achieved. How do you make sense of these things in light of your faith? How have you been able to help others to see those connections?

"Do you understand what you are reading?" It's a great question for all of us because sometimes we fail to make the connections that we should be. We need Philip to come trotting alongside our chariots to help us to understand.

Yet I believe more importantly for many of us who already follow Jesus we are called to be the Philips of this world, opening up people's eyes to God's faithfulness and work among us. Joining the dots of what people read and experience and their own lives - in other words sharing our faith....

Additional Thoughts

- When it comes to the flow of God's Spirit, are you the river or are you the rock?



- When do you know you need help with your faith? Do you ask for it? And are you available to offer help?

- Take a few moments to consider when have been the times a person like Philip has helped open your eyes and also to consider whether or not you are taking the opportunity to be like Philip and help others know God by sharing your faith. – Peter Lockhart
- How do you know when conflict is constructive? Is there ever a good time to be in conflict?
- Our forebears would probably object to much that is common practice for us now. What do you imagine will be common practice beyond your generation? Is this a good thing?
-