

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles

Third Sunday in Lent – March 19, 2017

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

John 4:5-42

For Reflection

"A woman is like a tea bag - you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water."

- Eleanor Roosevelt, American First Lady (1884-1962)

Women, Water and Words

A headline reads:

WOMEN LEAD THE PRAYER FOR WATER AT STANDING ROCK RESERVATION IN NORTH DAKOTA

BY DOROTHEE ROYAL-HEDINGER

And the author explains:

Mni wiconi—“Water is life.” This Lakota phrase weaves throughout my days here on Standing Rock Reservation...I've come to this community in response to an urgent call for support as they stand up to protect their precious water from the Dakota Access pipeline. This pipeline will cross through four states and carry crude oil across critical habitats and waterways, including under the Missouri River.

According to the New York Times, “The tribe says the pipeline’s route under the Missouri River near here could threaten its water supplies if the pipeline leaks or breaks, and it says the United States Army Corps of Engineers failed to do proper cultural and historical reviews before granting federal approvals for the pipeline.” Currently, people are occupying various spots along the river and pipeline construction is halted, pending a federal court decision.

I've come to take part in this gathering because unlike many political actions that are against, this is about standing in unity for life. This is about being in solidarity with a tribe that has not forgotten its role as caretakers of the land and protectors for the next seven generations.

What is beautiful about the makeshift camps that have popped up here is that they are filled with families and a feeling of shared purpose. There are daily prayers, and before each meal, ceremonial songs from diverse tribes are offered around the main fire. At the Sacred Stone Camp...a group of Lakota men drum and sing every night as the sun sets...

Mni wiconi—“Water is life.” It’s the women here who lead the way. From Winona LaDuke and Shailene Woodley to the mothers who stood on top of bulldozers and young activists like 13-year-old Takota Iron Eyes, the women are the heartbeat of this movement.

“It was the women who started this campaign,” says Carol Olowaan Plain, an Ojibwe/Pueblo woman who traveled from Denver to participate. Carol is a community activist and ceremonial leader whose partner, Doug Good Feather, grew up on the Standing Rock reservation. “When we got here, there were 20 women up at Sacred Stone Camp. … The women are keeping the children at the camp to make sure that everyone knows that their focus should be on the water and on the children and their children. So it keeps the men grounded.”

<http://invokemagazine.com/women-lead-water-prayer-standing-rock-reservation-north-dakota/>

And so with this in mind I read the lectionary texts for today. From the Hebrew scriptures we are given *Exodus 17:1-7* which begins:

1 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. **They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.**

2 The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"

3 But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

According to Hebrew texts, rabbinical writings and midrash, this lack of water came about when Moses and Aaron's sister, Miriam, died.

Miriam...together with her two brothers...was one of the three devoted shepherds of the people throughout their forty years' wandering in the desert on the way to the Promised Land.

Our sages say that the three great divine gifts that sustained the Jewish people in the desert—the **Manna, the clouds of glory and the well**—were in the merit of these three worthy shepherds, Moses, Aaron and Miriam respectively.

“Miriam’s Well,” as it became known—a rolling rock that accompanied the Jewish people on their wanderings—provided fresh water in the desert, not only for the people but also for their cattle and sheep. It also made the desert bloom with green pastures and beautifully scented flowers. Small wonder the people loved and respected this wise, God-fearing and saintly prophetess.

Miriam is mentioned in the Torah only a few times. Like the true mother in Israel that she was, she undoubtedly devoted her time to the women and children, and did not otherwise take part in public life...

Miriam died at the age of 126 (or 127) in Kadesh, and she was buried there.⁷ **When she died, a strange thing happened. The well suddenly dried up, and the rock from which the water used to flow disappeared among the other rocks in the desert. Now the people knew for sure that it was in Miriam's zechus (merit) that they had enjoyed fresh water all those years in the wilderness.**

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112396/jewish/Miriam.htm
By Nissan Mindel, Published and copyrighted by Kehot Publication Society

It is with the understanding that Miriam and women in general are the keepers and suppliers of the community water – that we get this piece of midrash from the Gospel of John 4:5-42. This is the longest conversation *between Jesus and ANYONE* recorded in the gospels and it takes place at a well where the women come to draw water for their families. Most of the women have come and gone in the cool morning hours. This is noon – so it is unusual to have a woman arriving in the heat of the day. Either there are a large number of people at the house using water – or a jar has tipped over and she has to replenish the supply – something has happened to send her here at this time.

And just to clear the air, there is nothing wrong with this woman. Jesus never judges her, labels her a sinner, or otherwise diminishes her. He just has a conversation with her. The reference to husbands is proof to her that he can “read” her life – that he knows her. Women at that time did not control their spousal choices. Fathers chose the husband for their daughters. When a husband died, it was customary that a brother-in-law would marry the widow to continue his brother’s family. We have no idea why this woman was passed along – possibly bad luck with husbands or abusive situations that led to her familial instability and, perhaps, ultimate servanthood to an unrelated man. In any case, she’s at the well in the middle of the day because they need more water at the house.

And this well may well be called “Jacob’s Well” – but there is deep knowledge of Miriam and her life-saving well in the wilderness that lives in this conversation about “living water.”

In this context, the metaphor of water for SPIRITUAL life is powerful. When we are born, our bodies are about 78% water. By one year of age, that amount drops to about 65%. [For adults, the average drops to] about 60%. <https://water.usgs.gov/edu/propertyyou.html> One must also note that children are inherently spiritually aware – sensitive to thin places where they sense the presence of the holy much more easily than adults. The metaphor is sustained.

We are made of water. [On Ash Wednesday we were] reminded with ashes that from the dust we have come and to the dust we shall return. Some were reminded with glitter that we are star stuff. Dust and ashes, starlight and glitter, yet we are still more water than any of these. We came from the water. We were enwombed in water. We were born in blood and water. We are water born.

<https://revgalblogpals.org/2017/03/17/11th-hour-preacher-party-courage-speaking-ones-mind-by-telling-all-ones-heart/>
Wil Gafney March 18, 2017

So, it is essential that in these times of flagrant disregard for the environment – as the planet warms and the water rises and we face the demise of the human race under water – it is essential that we remember what the Lakota tell us:

Mni wiconi—“Water is life.”

It has been [three years] since [21 April 2014] the government of Michigan poisoned their people in Flint, and they still do not all have clean water to drink.

The water protectors of the Lakota peoples are trying to protect the waters that feed not only their homes, but sustain the life of the world – waters that are in danger because the North Dakota Access Pipeline was routed away from the suburbs out of fear of what an oil spill might do to their land and water supply, and rerouted towards what remains of native land under native control because they and their children are expendable and oil is more valuable than water to some folk.

But [we]can't drink oil. Our treatment of this planet may well result in all of us being thirsty with an unquenchable thirst particularly without a functional Environmental Protection Agency in this country under the current regime.

<https://revgalblogpals.org/2017/03/17/11th-hour-preacher-party-courage-speaking-ones-mind-by-telling-all-ones-heart/>
Wil Gafney, March 18, 2017

Mni wiconi—“Water is life.”

We are the protectors – all of us – all who are water born – we are the protectors in Miriam's name, in the unknown name of the Woman at the Well, in the name of G-d.

Mni wiconi—“Water is life.”

INSTALLATION of Officers NEXT WEEK

Children's Time “The Hidden Messages in Water” Dr. Masaru Emoto

<http://www.whatthebleep.com/crystals/>

Dr. Emoto and the effect of thoughts on water crystals –
effect on ourselves and each other –be gentle with one another

Scripture Reading for Sunday March 19, 2017 – Third Sunday in Lent – Year A

John 4:5-42

5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' 11 The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' 13 Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' 15 The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

16 Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' 17 The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' 19 The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' 21 Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' 25 The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' 26 Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' 28 Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' 30 They left the city and were on their way to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' 32 But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' 33 So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' 34 Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35 Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36 The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'