

Rivers of Hope©**Genesis 21:14-19; John 4:7-14****August 12, 2012****Rev. Sharlyn Gates**

Isn't it alarming that 900 million people in our world lack safe drinking water? 3 million people die every year from water-related illness!

When I was in Mexico a few years ago, I was very careful to drink only bottled water, but still, I slipped up. I ate a fruit salad. The fruit had been washed by the local water and I became very sick! They called it Montezuma's revenge. It was weeks before I finally quite having terrible pain in my stomach and the fever went down for good. Luckily, the people I was staying with were a doctor's family and they took very good care of me with medicine and lots of rest.

I can only imagine how terrible it must be for those who get sick and have no money or medical help. And to think of people dying because of dirty, germ infested water when we have such good, clean water. It's such a terrible problem!

In the reading from Genesis today, we hear of a mother – Hagar – who was sent out into the desert with her little son because of the jealousy of Abraham's wife. What a heartbreak Hagar was experiencing! She gave her little boy the last of the water she had and knew he was going to die because there was no more water. She couldn't bear to witness him dying so she put him under a shrub and went a distance away, sobbing.

"I can't watch my little boy die!" she cried.

But God heard her cries and told her to go back to him. God told her to pick him up and hold him – that it was going to work out. When she looked up, she saw a well right there in the desert! God had saved them with living water!

2000 years later, we read of Jesus at the well in Samaria. It is there that he meets a Samaritan woman – a woman with a hard life and a past that caused most people to snub their noses at her. It is amazing that a Jewish man would even speak to her. But Jesus does. He asks her for a drink of water.

She is surprised that he is addressing her and she questions him about it. His reply to her is one that goes down through the years and touches us today right into our very souls:

"If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water."

Jesus said, "Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst – not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."

The thing is, we don't often hear, these days, of the kind of miracle we read about with Hagar – opening her eyes and finding that God placed a well right in the middle of the desert, just for her.

Of course, Jesus was using the image of water as a metaphor for his Holy Spirit that flows in us and through us and gives all who believe in Him a life that is transformed from sad and hopeless to one of joy and full of hope, full of new and wonderful life with him. It is a life that is completely immersed in God's love; a life that goes on, even after death. Jesus, in his death and his resurrection has conquered the fear of death and has promised everlasting life with God.

In that new and hopeful life that we have in him, here on earth – we do have an abundance of good things. For us that includes clean, fresh water to drink, and bath and cook with. But Jesus said for us to love our neighbors – and to care for those who are hurting and sick, to give to the poor.

How does a well appear in the desert? How does clean water happen in countries where there is no good water to drink?

It happens, of course, by the people of God helping – being the hands and feet and heart of Jesus himself – going to them with the equipment needed and the skills learned to install water treatment systems and to teach the people how to run them. It happens through God using us to make sure his blessings reach out to all people.

In Bible School, we met some of the people who have been given the gift of clean water through the Church wide program "Living Waters for the World." We met Benjamin from the little village of Cooch Holoch in Southern Mexico. Many of the people there live in mud huts with roofs made of leaves.

And we met Margarita and her little boys – Jose and Eduardo from Chahaball, Guatemala. Margarita's husband died when the boys were very little so she has to work very hard to provide the boys with food and clothing. Unfortunately, the boys were sick a lot because their water was full of germs. Margarita could not afford to buy bottled water for them to drink.

Thanks be to God, Benjamin and Margarita's villages have been given the gift of clean water because God's people cared enough to go install a water treatment system!

But we also met 4 year old Angela (Ahnhela). She lives in a tiny village in Haiti, where the water is very dirty. She is hoping that soon, someone will come to give her village a water purification system as well, so she can have clean water to drink. Angela is much smaller than a 4 year old should be because she is sick most of the time from drinking dirty water.

“Jesus said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” John 7:37-38

We have, here in the United States, the blessing of clean, pure drinking water. And we have been called by Jesus to reach out to others who are sick and hurting, who are dying, and offer them Rivers of Hope – Living Water for the World.

Wouldn’t it be a thrill to see everyone who believes become so passionate about giving this gift, that there would be no more people dying from drinking dirty water?

That living water Jesus offers our souls is the gift of the Holy Spirit that flows through us like a river, like a spring gushing up within us. And with the power of the Holy Spirit, anything can happen – And it probably will.

Let us pray ...

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