

Wesley United Methodist Church
Rev. Beverly E Stenmark
March 19, 2017
3rd Sunday in Lent
Text: Exodus 17:1-7
John 4:5-42

Title: Looking for Love: Look for the Thirst Quencher

I don't think that the producers of "The Bachelor" or "The Bachelorette" television show have women of my age in mind as their primary demographic, but, although it may come as a surprise to many of you, I am one of the large number of people who follow that show. I haven't quite figured out why it appeals to me but one of the commitments I have made to myself and as a pastor is that I will intentionally open myself to viewpoints and demographics that are different than what I would normally encounter. For that reason, among other things, I try to read news accounts that are from a perspective that is very different than mine.

I believe or hope that this helps me understand people who view things differently than me, and who live lives that I sometimes have difficulty understanding.

When I watch the Bachelor or the Bachelorette, I am exposed to a world that is very different than anything I ever knew. Being a student of human nature, I find myself caught up in trying to understand what is happening, and what the people on this show are experiencing and why they would put themselves in this situation.

The reason I share this today, is that there is an important part of it that makes me think about today's gospel story of the Samaritan woman. For those who are not familiar with the show, a series on the Bachelor or Bachelorette begins with a room of about 25 people who are hoping that at

the end of the series they will be engaged to marry the current Bachelor or Bachelorette. Each show ends with one or more persons being sent home.

The general reaction from those sent home is often tearful as they wonder aloud for the camera if they will ever find love, and what they could have done differently so that the bachelor or bachelorette would have fallen in love with them.

This angst is not limited to those who are sent home. Those who stay, also often express their fear that they won't be chosen, that they won't find love. The Bachelor or Bachelorette, who is inevitably someone who was close to being chosen and at the last minute was sent home on a previous series also shares great fear that they won't find love, that the person he or she ultimately chooses will say no, and that they will be left alone again.

The people on this show are thirsting for love and they have chosen to look for it through this venue. However, I also find myself wondering and looking for clues about the person's self-esteem, and about the things they value in life. I wonder about that great thirst for love, and the conviction that the only way that it will be satisfied is if this person falls in love with them; if they find the person that they can love forever. It probably won't come as a great surprise that there are only a very small number of couples who are together long after they commit to each other at the end of the show.

I suspect that a lot of this has to do with discovering that their thirst for love was not really satisfied by the love of this other person. Now, there's a lot of drama involved with the relationships on this show but for me the bottom line is the great thirst for love and trying to satisfy it in ways that are really only temporary.

The Woman in our gospel came at noon time to get water for her and her family. Most of the other women in the village would have come in the early morning hours when it would have been cooler. They would have gathered for fellowship and conversation as they also drew the water to satisfy their family's needs.

This woman came at noon time – the hottest time of the day, and the time when the likelihood of meeting anyone else would have been very slim. Much to her surprise, she met a man there and not just any man. This man was not a Samaritan, he was a Jew. He crossed significant social boundaries by even speaking to her. Men did not speak to women to who they were not related. Jews and Samaritans did not speak to each other and as the scripture reminded us, they did not share things in common. But Jesus wasn't any ordinary man, and he was always breaking all sorts of boundaries.

Jesus asked her for a drink and her response gave him the perfect opening for a deeper conversation. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" That was all Jesus needed to take the conversation deeper and to offer her something far more than she could imagine. He told her that he could give her living water and that whoever drinks of this living water will never be thirsty again.

As Jesus did with Nicodemus in last week's Gospel where he talked about being born from above, Jesus uses the most common ordinary things to share a wonderful spiritual truth. Clearly, Jesus is not offering her water that you drink that magically will never make you thirsty again, although it took her awhile to understand this.

Jesus was offering "living water" something that gives meaning to life far beyond anything that we can attain on our own.

John's Gospel begins with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." John, of course, is speaking about Jesus. Jesus was the word of God made flesh. Jesus is the very stuff of life – the essentials for life - bread and water. Without bread and water (or their equivalent) we will die. Without Jesus, our life may continue physically, but we will always be searching for that which satisfies, not just for right now but forever.

All too many of us or those around us, look to satisfy their thirst by drinking of the sugary drinks that promise to satisfy. We dip our cups in the streams and fountains of modern life. We may try to fill ourselves with the drinks of power, or possessions, or popularity, or pleasure. Like the men and women on the show, we may try to fill ourselves with the love of another person.

Now, any or all of these things can offer pleasure and they are often good, but as good as they may be, they do not satisfy our thirst forever. When people get power, they are soon looking for more power. When we focus on possessions, whatever we have is never enough – there is always a newer version, or something with more features. We can be popular with other people and incredibly lonely within ourselves and realize that those who most want to be with us, may not really know who we are in the secret places of our hearts. Many many people find great comfort and love in a life companion and that is absolutely wonderful; but that is not likely to happen if you make that person responsible for your happiness and it is horribly unfair to expect someone else to satisfy our needs.

I have had too many conversations with young women – who are barely more than children themselves, who wanted desperately to have a

baby because they want someone to love them. There is something absolutely wonderful about holding an infant and being wrapped up in love for that child. But that is us loving the baby, not the baby loving us. Those of us who have had children know that as often and as much as our children love us, there are also times when they are angry at us, or want nothing to do with us. Probably every parent has heard at some time, “I hate you” yelled by a child whose great wish has been denied. As soon as our children can start to move on their own they are starting to move away from us – and that is the way it should be. It is our job as parents and grandparents to help our children and grandchildren grow up to be people who can become loving capable adults. They will probably love us, but it is not their job to fawn on us, to worship us, and love us so that we can be satisfied.

Our thirst is for truth and meaning. Our search is for a purpose in life and that cannot be found in power, possessions, popularity, pleasure, or even another person, no matter how wonderful that person may be. All of these sources will satisfy our thirst for a while, but we will become thirsty again.

During Jesus conversation with the woman at the well, she revealed her deeper yearning to know about how to worship God, and her desire for the day when the messiah would come and answer all her questions. Jesus then told her that he was the Messiah. This is the first time that he has said this openly, and he says this not to his disciples, not to other Jews, not to other men, but to a woman, and a Samaritan at that. It is almost impossible for us to realize how really amazing this was. But she had indicated that she was waiting for and open to the Messiah and Jesus knew this was the best way to transform her life.

Something happened in her right then and there. She returned to her village immediately. She didn't even take her water jar with her – the water that she had walked in the hot blistering noon day sun to obtain. She left her water jar and went back to the city. This woman who had avoided other people, who was considered an outcast, who had not come for water when the other women were there so that she could socialize – she went back to the city and said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done? He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

She became the evangelist. She shared her experience and she became the one who brought others to Jesus. They believed her, and they came to see for themselves. They asked Jesus to stay with him and he did – for two days. This Jewish rabbi staying with a community of Samaritans. After two days, 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 Savior of the world.

They were filled by the living water, the Word of God who became flesh and came to them, dwelt with them for two days, and gave them the water that satisfies for life.

Nothing short of living water that flows from a real living relationship with God can satisfy. That is the kind of life that Jesus offers to each of us. That is the kind of love that can satisfy completely. That is the living water that gives our lives meaning and purpose.

The well is deep, and we need to reach deeply into the well. We deepen our relationship with God through studying scripture, praying on a regular basis - not only when we are in trouble, worshipping God as often as possible – and that includes both Sunday worship, and worship in our walking, driving, playing, and all of our life. We deepen our relationship

with God by opening ourselves to the needs of others and responding to them so that we can share God's love through our service, life and sometimes even our words.

The Samaritan woman had been searching for love in all the wrong places, but she found real love, in her life-changing encounter with Jesus. Her life was different after that – the first evidence of that was that she went and told everyone about Jesus so that they also wanted to come and see him. She told everyone about Jesus because she was so excited and wanted to share what she had experienced.

Jesus says to us, "If you are thirsty, come to me and drink." Jesus gives us the living water that satisfies our thirst.