

Living Water
Sunday, August 20, 2023, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Alfredo Feregrino

Water, living water.

It is perhaps difficult to think about flowing rivers of water, living here in Pasadena. But what is happening today changes everything. Actually, this is weird... I did not plan this at all but coincidentally, I wrote my sermon about the concept of water. And here we are expecting/experiencing a record breaking storm.

Probably we will have a lot of water today or tomorrow depending of the storm progression. Some areas of Southern California according to the news could see a year's worth of rain in the coming days as Hurricane Hilary arrives.

Depending on how you look at it, this could actually be a blessing because we need more water in our region.

I remember one of my most beautiful experiences of water happened on the ranch where my grandmother lived in the countryside of Mexico. By her home was river.

This was a small /shallow river with clean and crystalline water fed with rainwater that descended from the mountains. It was beautiful.

I really enjoyed going swimming there with my siblings, and one of my favorite activities was to lift stones in the river and catch crayfish. I put them in a small bucket and took them to my mother so she could make me a delicious soup, with chilies, lime and crayfish which created a wonderful broth, it was super yummy.

The amazing thing was that, I didn't have to go to the supermarket to buy them. In fact, at that time the concept of going to the super market did not exist. There was no electricity there and the ranch was totally self-sustaining and nature was so bountiful.

And so, my grandmother's house was by the river, the river was a source livelihood, the river was everything. And this help me to realize how water can be alive, and how water can give us so much.

In the gospel that we just heard, Jesus is in Jerusalem. In the feast of the Tabernacles.

According to Jewish tradition...God wanted the Israelites to observe this festival by living in temporary shelters for seven days, basically they were temporary dwellings made out of branches and palm leaves as a reminder that when their ancestors were in the wilderness, in

the desert, God provided them booths to dwell in. So, try to imagine, during that feast, Jerusalem was transformed into a massive campsite.

So, the feast was seven days long and at the last day, this feast included a water libation ritual.

A libation is an ancient ritual of pouring of a liquid as an offering to a deity or spirit. This was common in many religions at that time.

During this ritual, during the feast, the priest would walk from the temple to the nearby sacred pool (the pool of Siloam), draw water into a golden pitcher and returned to the temple to pour the water on the altar.

This ritual reenacted the miraculous moment in the wilderness- as told in the book of Exodus- when the Israelites complained to Moses that they had no water to drink, so Moses after listening to God's instructions he struck the rock with his staff and water came forth from the rock (Exod. 17:1-6),

and with this reference in mind , Jesus quoted the scriptures:

“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” This is the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) translation that I am using.

So, water, why water?

Water is mentioned more than 700 times in the bible.

Throughout the scriptures creation begins with the breath of God sweeping over the face of the waters (Gen 1:2) From the midst of the storming waters, God is bringing order out of chaos.

So it is important to have a sense of the spiritual imagery that our sacred scriptures use, to get into the minds of the people in the Palestine of the 1st century and to understand how they experienced God’s presence in the context of their world.

And Living water is a prominent image. And essential metaphor.

In the Middle East, with its dry climate, water was precious, and very much needed for survival. It rained very few times a year, so most of the time the peoples in the past survived on water that was stored in cisterns/containers in the ground. So rain was seen as a miraculous gift from God.

The difference with or without rain in that part of the world is amazing –our geography in this region in central California is kind of similar, the hills can be unfertile and brown much of the year, but after a season of rain, those hills are covered with green meadows and flowers.

Remember, it was beautiful to witness this in the spring, a few months ago in our region, as we were driving in the freeway we were able to see so much green and so many beautiful white and yellow blossoms.

So according with this perception, the idea of living water, which refers to the form of rain or water flowing from a natural spring has to come directly from God..

It is interesting to note that in the book of *Deuteronomy*, living water was strongly associated with the presence of God. (11:10-12)

God said to the Israelites leaving Egypt:

“For the land that you are about to enter to occupy is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come... But the land that you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys watered by rain from heaven, a land that the Lord your God watches over perpetually.”

The difference between Egypt and the promised land was that in Egypt, almost no rain fell, and crops were entirely irrigated by the flooding of the Nile river and by the labor of hand-watering/ while in the promised land of Canaan was entirely watered directly by the rain from God.

So, when God chose the Promised Land, God did not choose a place where the Israelites could have security by their own efforts, instead it was a land where they would learn to trust and depend on God.

Living water in the form of rain was an assurance of God’s presence among them.

And, this living water according to the Fourth Gospel (John) is the Spirit.

Living water is the perfect metaphor for the abundance of the divine Spirit among us.

You know, it is very difficult, perhaps impossible to give a definition of the Divine.

God can never be fully described within our human language.

All human language about God is metaphorical and everything we say about God is a metaphor.

There is not an image or a name that can capture the fullness of God or the Spirit....any image or name would be just a glimpse of the Divine.

So, with this understanding I would say that:

The living water is the Spirit of God flowing through us like a divine river of God’s love and abundance.

And you know what, this Spirit is the love of God that is flowing out of you.

Out of your heart; Out of your mouth; Out of your eyes.

The living water of the Divine flowing out from you.

Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water, Jesus said

The heart is the source of the wellspring of life.

In our sacred scriptures, the heart is considered the vessel, the container of life and strength.

The heart is the seat of our desires, our emotions, our thoughts and plans.

The heart is the center of a person's life from where everything flows.

We are the vessels that carry this divine flow.

"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." Jesus said...

So, Imagine your heart as a vessel, as a cup, a big cup filled with this living water.

This is the living love of God. It is a cup overflowing with love and abundance.

Imagine that you are the vessel; the living water begins to flow out of you, endlessly, a never-ending supply.

Can you imagine what we could do if we all had this awareness?

So, when you are aware that the Holy Spirit lives in you, your heart becomes filled with living water, the living love of God. It begins to flow out from your heart endlessly.

So I wonder, how is your flow now, are you a vessel for this living water of love and abundance?

Or is there something interrupting this flow?

Are you shutting it down?

Do you feel disconnected from this flow?

Sometimes we forget that this flow was never meant to come from ourselves. Sometimes we feel we are depleted, Sometimes we feel we have nothing left to give, sometimes we feel that our cup is empty.

But remember those words Jesus quoted from the scriptures "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."

"If anyone thirsts, come to me and drink". Jesus said...

You see, we may forget that we are the vessels and that if we open ourselves to the Divine first, we can drink whenever we are thirsty, and that from God we have an endless flow of love and abundance for ourselves and for everyone we encounter in our lives.

Just like that beautiful river near my grandmother house, full of sparkling crystalline water, full of life and joy and abundance, we can become instruments of the Spirit, we can become that source of that living water.

AMEN

***A note from the preacher:** Because sermons are meant to be preached and therefore prepared with emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*