



Did you know that a very precise measurement of the amount of water within a kernel tells growers when the kernel is ready to be called popcorn? Too much or too little and the kernel either won't pop at all or it pops but is mushy and not good for eating. The kernel looks hard and impenetrable to us but it actually has a certain level of moisture that is necessary for the kernel to be transformed into a tasty treat.

According to American Indian legend, "quiet, contented spirits live inside each kernel. When their homes are heated, the spirits become angry, shaking the kernels more and more vigorously. When the heat finally becomes unbearable, the spirits burst out of their homes and into the air in a disgruntled puff of steam."¹ That tiny amount of water inside each kernel is necessary for life as popcorn, if you will.

We hear messages routinely from our physicians, sports trainers and the media about the necessity of staying hydrated. We need a certain level of water in our bodies to remain fully functional. Dehydration is a major challenge when we become sick and as we age. We're told to drink before we are thirsty- if we wait to drink until we are thirsty, we are already dehydrated. We can't think as well. Our judgments may be impaired when we do not have enough water in us.

The Israelites wandering the wilderness were suffering from a lack of water. They had complained to Moses and to God for bread and received manna. They now were complaining to Moses and to God for water. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" they cry. Poor Moses has had it with their grumbling and whining. He is trying to lead a people who seemingly are never pleased. So Moses, in turn, grumbles and whines to God: "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." Talk about potentially killing the one who is leading you from slavery into freedom. Not being able to see past your nose. Focus only on the immediate needs and not the long term benefits.

We humans are not much different today. Your doctor tells us to exercise at least 30 minutes most every day of the week in order to stave off illness and yet it's so hard for many of us to take that little bit of time to be pro-active. We know with our head but our heart wants to sit and read rather than get up and go. We are, too often, our own worst enemies. In Paul's words, we do what we should not do and we do not do what we should. It seems to be the human condition. Why is it that we wait until we are dehydrated to drink water? Why is it we thirst for love and yet find it hard to love others? Why is it that we hear and read the Word of God and yet sometimes have a hard time putting what we know we should be doing into practice?

¹ Terra Brockman "Summer's bounty in winter: Popcorn season" in Christian Century Magazine, 3/5/2014, p. 10.

Exodus 17:1-7; Ps. 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

God tells Moses to take his staff- the same one that parted the Red Sea, the same one that when thrown down becomes a snake and when raised up returns to being a staff- to take his staff and go with some of the elders to a rock and there to strike the rock and water will come out of it. Water necessary for life. Water sufficient to quell the grumbling of the Israelites. And the elders will witness this act and be able to speak about it to the multitudes. The elders are delegated by Moses to spread the word of God's saving acts once again.

Whether the complaint is about bread or water, the underlying question is whether the Lord is among the people of Israel or not. Despite all that Moses, as God's chosen prophet, has done to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt and care for them during their wanderings in the wilderness, at least some of the people still question whether the Lord is among them. Can't you just hear Moses saying "how long, o Lord, how long, until the people know that you are God and that you are with them in all ways and at all times."

Not too dissimilar to us. We want what we want when we want it. It doesn't matter that we have accepted God's presence in our life yesterday. It is today that matters. As we quip sometimes about someone whose demands seem incessant: it's not what you did for me yesterday. It's what have you done for me today. We seem never to be satisfied. We have a hard time trusting that God who was with us yesterday is in fact with us today.

The Psalmist reminds us that God is the rock of our salvation. Just as Moses, at God's instruction, used his staff to strike the rock to bring forth water, this Psalmist reminds us that God is the rock of our salvation even today. We are reminded that all of creation has been made by God from the caverns of the earth to the heights of the hills; the seas and the dry lands. And the Psalmist urges us to respect and accept our places in creation neither lifting ourselves up as not needing God nor denying that God exists. Do not harden your hearts but rather rejoice in all that the Lord has done for you and for me.

When Jesus meets the woman at the well, they begin an extraordinary conversation. Meeting at the well of Jacob, he who is renamed Israel after wrestling with the angels all night long; we are reminded of how central water is to our physical and to our spiritual well-being. The story of the woman at the well contrasts nicely with the story from last week about Nicodemus. Nicodemus and the woman are far apart in many ways:

- (a) He comes at midnight for fear that his standing in the community will be harmed if he is seen talking to Jesus; she comes at high noon when there are no shadows to hide behind. Her standing does not seem to be able to go lower than it already is.
- (b) Nicodemus is a learned man and teacher. She appears to not have formal education and is not accepted in her community as one to look up to.
- (c) Jesus appears frustrated with Nicodemus's inability to see other than literally. He goes away disappointed because he does not understand. She questions Jesus and when Jesus responds to her with knowledge of her life and challenges, she immediately runs back into town and proclaims the good news. And, wonder of wonders, this one who most likely was an outcast is able to motivate others to return and listen to Jesus as Messiah.

There are other contrasts that can be drawn between the experience of Nicodemus and the experience of the woman at the well with Jesus. But these set the stage for the lesson for today.

Exodus 17:1-7; Ps. 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Yes, the woman can draw liquid H₂O from the well via a bucket. And yes, that water will quench the immediate thirst while doing nothing for the spiritual thirst. Jesus offers living water- water that goes deep within the soul and will expand to care for our entire being if we will but drink of it. This water- the living water that Jesus offers- will feed our souls for ever if we will be open to it. All we have to do is accept that Jesus is the Messiah, the one sent by God to us to show us the way to live.

It is far less important to Jesus that we worship in a particular place- whether Mount Gerizim of the Samaritans or Jerusalem of the Jews- the place matters not. True worshippers, Jesus tells us, “will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The same offer is made to us today. Drink H₂O and your body will be hydrated and you can do what you need to do in this world. Drink of the living water offered by Jesus and know that you will have eternal life. The thirst within you for relationship with God will be filled, over and over and over again. You will never thirst again if you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who comes to walk with us and talk with us and to show us how to live- and yes, how to die. The one who knows that we, metaphorically, have had 5 husbands and the one with whom we are living now is not our husband – the one who loves us anyway and provides food to eat and water to drink.

And Jesus does not have to measure the amount of water inside our kernels – for if we accept Jesus, the amount inside of our kernels is always exactly right and we will pop, like that kernel, into something wonderful and lovely. **Amen.**