

**July 5, 2009**  
**Communion Sunday**

John 4:5-14, John 6:48-51

**Remembering and Reconnecting**

Over the years my family and I have traveled up Highway 395 through the Owens Valley east of the Sierra Nevada mountains many times. In the spring and in the winter it is a beautiful drive, with the snow-capped mountains to the west, but in the summer and early fall it can be very hot and dry, with the desert wind blowing across from Nevada and kicking up the dust.

If your car breaks down on that road in the summer, I hope you have some water in the car with you! Because you will soon be very thirsty!

For a long time the landscape showed its thirst, too, dry and brown and dusty. But the Owens Valley was not always so dry! It used to be lush and green along the river.

For many, many years the Owens River water was diverted through the aqueduct to quench the thirst of the people of LA. The lawns of LA were green and lush, while the riverbed up north went dry and drier. The resultant dust blowing in the wind created many health problems for the people living there.

So a few years ago legislation was passed. Less water has been diverted to LA. The Owens River flows again, the plants along the riverbed are coming back to life, and the dust is no longer such a problem.

You can see where the water is because there is green there.

There is cool and shade. The plants along the riverbed are no longer thirsty. And the water brings with it the nutrients that the plants need as well, washed down from the mountains and enriching the soil.

Where the water flows, life has returned.

In our scripture today, when Jesus says “living water” the word in Hebrew can also mean “flowing” or “running water”. Well water kept the people alive, but it was hard work to draw the water in a bucket up from that deep well. They had to lower the bucket on a long rope and then pull it up. Did you know that water weighs more than 8 pounds a gallon? So even 3 or 4 gallons at a time would have been real work to raise! And how far would that 3 or 4 gallons go for cooking, cleaning, bathing?

Flowing water would have been easier, just dip your bucket in and scoop it up. It's why so many cities and towns have been built on the banks of rivers. A plentiful source of water there for the taking!

So when the woman was there at the well, she was not expecting an easy task getting her own water, and then here was this stranger asking her to give him some of what she was working so hard for!! The water she needed so much would be diverted, not to LA, but to the mouth of a thirsty man!

She was alone when she met Jesus. Most women came together, to help each other, to make the chore easier and more fun --- together. We don't really know why she was alone. It seems that she had some relationship problems. At any rate, Jesus doesn't seem to have any problem beginning a relationship with her, despite the fact that it was not culturally acceptable for him to do so.

In those days, Jews went out of their way to avoid Samaritans, who did not hold Jerusalem to be the proper place to worship God. So the Jews looked down on them. And rabbis—teachers, like Jesus--- did not take a chance on tarnishing their reputations by talking to women.

Jesus broke **all** the rules by talking to a Samaritan woman!

Extending God's love and grace to someone who was not one of the Chosen People, the Jews! A foreigner. A woman!

Jesus offered her living water. It wasn't something she had to work hard to get! Instead of drawing water up from a deep well using a rope and a bucket, he offered her "springs of living water"—flowing water, available for the taking, abundant, overflowing up out of the ground and free for all, no bucket, no rope, no muscles required! The water would no longer be diverted, no longer confined to the bottom of a deep well, hard to get.

Living water----A gift from God!

A gift that IS God! Because Jesus was offering her himself! He IS the living water, something that we need f899(o)7.948685(!)21.1( )-4.94659(t)3.97329(.)278

He is both food and drink to sustain us.

We can only live a few weeks without food, a few days without water.

But Jesus was not saying that literally we would never have to eat or drink again once we have the Living bread and the Living water! Of course not! We still have our physical bodies that we need to take care of and that requires physical food and water!

He was talking about the needs we have deep down in our souls, what we need to nourish our spirits! He was talking about spiritual food and drink. The nourishment we get from relationships with God and with each other.

We have a very real need for relationship. It's how we were created. God created us to be company for himself, and God also said, It is not good for a person to be alone, so he created us to be companions for each other as well.

When Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love neighbor, it reflects these two reasons we were created----to be in relationships with God and with each other.

The woman at the well, being alone, had a need for relationship. She must have longed for friends, for someone to draw water with.

After she began her relationship with Jesus, she ran off to tell other people, too! The woman who was alone at the well, which was typically a place for community, suddenly had a reason to talk to others, and they had a reason to listen to her, to follow her back to Jesus and meet the one who offered them living water.

In the midst of all this, the woman undoubtedly began relationships with other people.

By the time Jesus left Samaria, I cannot imagine that the woman was still alone when she went to draw water at the well. Her life had changed. The living water was restored to her life, bringing life and growth and beauty. She became part of the community. She had found communion with Christ.

But this passage about living water leaves some questions. If drinking living water gives you eternal life, why do we need to participate in communion again and again? Shouldn't it be like baptism----once is enough?



When Jesus describes himself as living bread, he answers that question.

He talks about the manna that God provided for the Hebrew people in the wilderness. Even though it was not the bread of heaven, the living bread, there are still some similarities.

For forty years of wandering, the Hebrews woke up every morning and found manna lying on the ground. They gathered it up and it was enough to eat.

But if they tried to gather up too much, it spoiled. They couldn't save it up, except on the day before the Sabbath, when they could collect enough for two days. But they couldn't keep enough for longer than that. "Give us this day our daily bread," not "give us enough bread to fill our fridge and the freezer, too!"

The bread of heaven is not something that can be stored up, either.

The spiritual food that we receive during communion is something we have to take in over and over. The living water, too, bubbles up from the spring fresh all the time. So communion is something that we can't store up.

You can't have a relationship with Christ by meeting him once. A relationship is fresh and new every day. We are not the same as we were ten, fifteen, twenty years ago, or even the same as last week! If the relationships we have are to stay vital and enriching, we must help them to grow!

And we can do that by receiving communion often.

On our own, without the sacrament, we get distracted by other things, by work, by other people, by the need to provide for ourselves and our families, by the day-to-day demands and concerns of life.

Communion brings us back to our relationship with God. It reminds us of all that God has done for us and all that God is still doing for us.

Communion is a time to stop for a moment and remember how much God loves us. Whenever we take time for God, when we rest in love and peace and grace, our relationship with God grows and we remember who we are and who we were created to be, beloved children of God.

Communion is a time for remembering and for reconnecting with God. Without this solid foundation for our lives we can easily be caught up in just working to get today's water from that deep, deep well, and we can miss the living water that is flowing right in front of us.

We can be so busy trying to bring home the bacon, to put food on the table that we forget how important it is to feast on the bread of heaven!

We can dry up, like the Owens River, because our energy is diverted elsewhere. And all that is left is brown and deadness and dust.

But in communion, the water is allowed to flow again, The dam is broken, the water flows full force, washing away the dust, bringing nourishment and life back to us, allowing our spirits to grow and thrive and become green and healthy once again.

In communion we reconnect with our source, with our living water, with God who gave us life. We remember everything that God has done, we become aware of all that God is doing, and we find trust that God will continue to take care of us.

I want to take this one step further.

Just as the woman at the well began a relationship with Christ that day, she also began a new relationship with many people in her town. Communion is not only about our relationship with Christ, as important as that is.

Communion also connects or reconnects us with other people.

In communion, we are connected to Christ, and through Christ we are connected to everyone who ever has lived, who lives now, who ever will live. Just as Christ was the connecting link between the woman at the well and the other people in her village, so Christ is the connecting link between us and everyone else in our world!

Let me tell you something about myself---

Communion is very powerful for me. The desire to serve communion is a big part of my call story. In communion, I always have an amazing sense of God's presence, of God's grace. But within that often overwhelming grace, I also feel the presence of loved ones, near and far, living and dead. And there are many whom I do not know also with me, experiencing God as well. It is an incredible web of relationship, all with Christ at the center, all of us drinking the living water, eating the living bread.

It can be very emotional. It is always very powerful. And church is a good place for those feelings, those experiences.

They are part of all the relationships that feed and nurture all of us, the connections that we must renew so that we do not forget.

This is what reminds us that we are not just here for today and then gone, but that we have eternal life in Christ.

In communion we are all connected with each other in the loving embrace of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the light of the living water, the living bread,

The living Christ.

Amen.