WATER

Water- it is something we have grown accustomed to having. We go into the kitchen, turn on the faucet and instantly we have running water. If we turn the faucet handle one direction or another we have hot water or cold water. Many of us have refrigerators which have ice cubes, crushed ice and water available on the front of the refrigerator door. Or we may have automatic icemakers supplying us with endless quantities of frozen water in the shape of cubes.

We walk outside and turn on a faucet and we immediately have water to help our plants and flowers survive. Or we may hook up a sprinkler to the hose and water our lawns and gardens. We may even have a sprinkler system which automatically starts and stops without us having to run outside and do anything at all!!

We see people all over the United States carrying water bottles filled with “spring water”. This water is supposed to taste better than tap water because it contains no chlorine or minerals. There are hundreds of name brands of bottled water which are readily available to us… for a price.

Each morning we get up and head for the shower to help us “wake up” and prepare for the day. We turn on the shower and we have instant warm water in which to bathe and help us loosen our sore muscles and joints.

Water- It isn’t anything I really think about… until there isn’t any to drink. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the surrounding gulf communities, there was water everywhere, but it was not safe to drink. As you know the breaking of the levies in New Orleans caused so much damage to the homes and communities below sea level that people were stranded on rooftops, in attics and in stadiums. Water everywhere ------- but not a drop to drink. People were crying for water, fresh water, to quench their thirst. As days wore on people were begging for water, even just a little bit of water so they could survive. There were those who did not live thru this natural disaster because they did not have any water to drink.

Water is of great importance to us today as well as to the people of the Bible. We know that water has 3 purposes in the Bible: Cleansing, danger and refreshment.

Cleansing of the feet or foot washing was first mentioned in Genesis 18. Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent. He suddenly noticed three men standing nearby. He got up and ran to meet them, welcoming them by bowing low to the ground. “My lord” he said, “if it pleases you, stop here for a while. Rest in the shade of this tree while my servants get some water to wash your feet.” However foot washing became a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ to enable man to fulfill the law of God… Thou shalt love thy neighbor as yourself.

In the Old Testament, in Numbers 19, water of purification is discussed. Water for bathing and clothes washing was required for purification for priests and those involved in purification ceremonies for the removal of sin.

Baptism also uses water for cleansing. When we are baptized we are completely immersed in water symbolizing that we are completely immersed into Jesus Christ so that we may share His death, burial and resurrection.

We also know that water signified danger or death. In Exodus 14:21 Moses raised his hand over the sea and the Lord opened up a path through the water with a strong east wind. The wind blew all that night turning the seabed into dry land. So the people of Israel walked through the sea on dry ground with walls of water on each side. V26 When the Israelites were on the other side, the Lord said to Moses, “Raise your hand over the sea again. Then the waters will rush back over the Egyptian chariots and charioteers.” So as the sun began to rise, Moses raised his hand over the sea. The water roared back into its usual place, and the Lord swept the terrified Egyptians into the surging currents. The waters covered all the chariots and charioteers the entire army of Pharaoh. Of all the Egyptians who had chased the Israelites into the sea not a single one survived.

In the New Testament we know that the disciples are frightened by the waves and fear that the water will drown them.

The people of the Bible lived in a dry country, completely dependent on the seasonal rains. Fresh water was not available everywhere and the task of digging wells and cisterns was a difficult one. There were different types of water found in the land of Israel. Cistern water was rainwater trapped in pits dug by hand out of solid rock and were plastered so they would hold water. They needed constant care because the plaster tended to fall off, which allowed the precious water to leak out. In Israel, the rainy season is only 5 months long, stretching from November through March. Since fresh springs are rare, most ancient cities, towns and even households used cisterns to catch and store rain runoff from rooftops, courtyards and even streets. The houses and streets were equipped with gutters that would channel the water in the rainy season for use during the 9 months of hot cloudless skies. Consequently, cistern water wasn't like the clean fresh water of a spring. It was usually stale and dirty – perhaps even fouled by dead animals. The cisterns needed to be cleaned to prevent the stagnant water from harboring water born diseases. Cistern water was considered ritually impure and was not used in religious ceremonies.

Running water, especially spring water was different. It stayed fresh and clean. Unlike cistern water which was not dependable because one season it might not rain or the plaster might leak and the water seep away. Spring water was dependable providing water year round. This constant fresh source of water was called "living water" probably portraying its life-giving qualities as well as its constant freshness.

God has been described and provides Living water. Jesus, during the feast of Sukkot, declared himself to be "living water" for the world.

Psalm 107:9 For He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

Jeremiah 2:13 For my people have done 2 evil things: they have forsaken me – the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!

The children of Israel were drinking from dirty water of their own making. They had forsaken the poor, the stranger, and the different. They had mistaken religious ceremony for religious practice. They had carved out of the rock a worldview that drank solely from the culture and not from the spring of revelation. Their own cisterns had left them thirsty once again.

Zechariah 14: 8 Watch for the day of the Lord is coming. On that day life-giving waters will flow out from Jerusalem.

In the New Testament, John 4:1-26 tells the story of the Jesus and the Woman at the well. Jesus had left Judea to return to Galilee. He had to go through the hostile territory of the Samaritan's. The Samaritans and the Jews had a long history of mistrust and violence toward one another. Eventually Jesus came to a Samaritan village. Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside a well about noontime. John 4 verse 7 -- Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said to her. "Please give me a drink". He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

Hospitality was one of the greatest virtues in the ancient world and giving a stranger a drink would have been a religious obligation, but Jesus had broken some unspoken rules of protocol. Not only was Jesus speaking with an enemy, but he was speaking to a woman who had been through several marriages and was now living with a man who wasn't her husband. This kind of lifestyle was highly immoral to an observant Jew in Jesus' day.

Verse 9 The woman was surprised, for Jews refused to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who I am, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."
But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket" she said, " and this is a very deep well, Where would you get this living water? And besides

are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his cattle enjoyed? Jesus replied, “People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water, but the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life”.

Jesus then told the woman about her past and her 5 husbands and the man she was living with although they were not even married.

Lets take a look at this scripture. Jesus sat by a well with a Samaritan woman to talk about thirst. We know that Jesus came to earth to offer to the broken and thirsty. The water that Jesus offered held no judgment for the misfits and the outcasts. These were the very people that Jesus went out of his way to find. A woman like the Samaritan was little more than a prostitute in the eyes of her peers, and certainly a social misfit. Jesus and the woman began to talk about water, spiritual water, the coming Messiah and the promises of God. God’s water is for anyone who wants to drink. To the Samaritan woman, Jesus had exposed her unhealthy pattern of broken relationships. He exposed her “broken cisterns” and showed her the way of Living water.

The living water of Jesus offers wholeness and peace in this world. This is the path of eternal life. To drink now from Jesus teachings is to have the well of God in our very being. As our thirst begins to be quenched, the spring of God flows out to the broken around us.

Whenever Doug and I are traveling I love to listen to the sounds of the surroundings. Sometimes it is the wind in the trees. Sometimes it is the sound of horns from cars or the blast from trains or planes. My favorite sound however is the sound of the ocean as it crashes against the shore. Its repetitive sound is soothing and comforting. I also love to hear the sound of rain as it pours down on the roof or against the windowpanes. The sound of water gives me peace. The use of water since the beginning of time by God shows us that water is essential for our existence. It is not the water that is used for drinking or the water used for cleansing or the water that provides danger that is so essential, but rather the living water of Jesus Christ that offers wholeness and peace in this world. Sometimes I think of

myself as a jagged rock. While in Idaho last week we saw thousands of jagged rocks that had fallen or been blasted free from huge boulders. These rocks remain jagged unless they find their way into the mountain streams. Over time, these jagged rocks in the streams become less and less jagged. They actually become smooth and are known as river rocks. This process doesn't happen quickly. It takes centuries for this process to smooth the rocks. This long process is like our life. We are jagged and rough with sharp edges that can cause hurt, rebelliousness, greed, anger or envy. But with God's living water continually running over us we become smoother and less likely to have sharp edges. I am challenging you to examine yourself and see if you have any sharp edges that can be smoothed away with God's living water. Living water that satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. The living water of Jesus offers wholeness and peace, it smoothes us and makes us concerned for the poor, the stranger and misfit. As you leave tonight, you have the opportunity to take a stone from the pile in the back. I hope you will put that stone on your desk, or your windowsill or in your pocket. When you see that smooth stone I hope it will remind you of God's mercy and grace and his gift of living water that smoothes us and shapes us into the kind of people God wants us to be.