

REFLECTIONS FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT ~ 12 March 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

"O that today you would listen to God's voice!" – in today's readings for the third Sunday of Lent, God speaks to us through water and rock, two precious elements of Earth. If you want to see images for how God cares for God's people, follow the flow of water through the scriptures. Wilderness, exodus, baptism, tempest: whether providing water, saving people from it, immersing them in it, or calming it, God uses water as a vivid sign of providence, deliverance, and grace. In an interesting way, the living water is linked with the stability and steadfastness of rock – the rock on which God stands in the wilderness or the rock of the wells and the fountains.

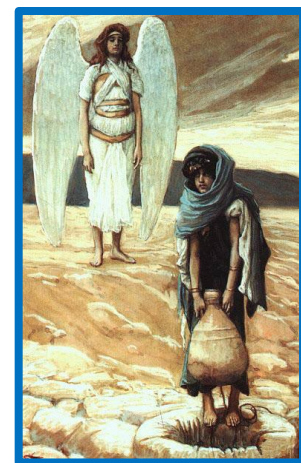


Miriam's Well, Nancy O'Neil

In the first reading from Exodus, the people wandering in the wilderness feel lost, uncertain, and afraid. They cry out against God and the unfairness of their situation, certain that they and their livestock will die from thirst. God says to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink" (Ex 17:5-6). This story is repeated in Numbers 20 after the death of Miriam when the waters again dry up. Once again God tells Moses to strike the rock, and "water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank" (Num 20:11). There is a Jewish tradition that, after this event, the rock moves with the people through the wilderness, stopping when they stop and providing water for the people and their livestock. It becomes known as Miriam's Well. There is a lovely line in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* that reads, "What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well."

The pastor and poet, [Steve Garnaas-Holmes](#), gives us a poignant learning about seeking that well in the desert, the abundant water in the rock:

Sometimes
life will be demanded of you that you don't have.
Miracles will be asked of you that you can't do.
Faith will be expected of you that you can't always maintain.
Hope will be needed, hope you may not have.
This happens to leaders, happens to parents, to friends.
Sometimes it happens with your own life.
Sometimes you will have nothing to offer.
You won't know what to do, or how to do it.
You have no idea how to strike the rock.
Strike the rock anyway.
The power is not in your power,
not in your strength or skill.
The unseen awaits in the sanctuary,
in the holy empty space of your unknowing,
where you have left room for the Mystery,
in the shimmering vacancy of your willingness.
Strike the rock.
And have a bucket ready.

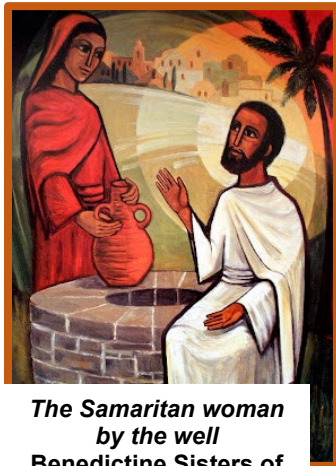


**Hagar and the Angel in the Desert
James Tissot**

Images of living water from the rock and from the well are visible before, during and after the people of Israel enter the Promised Land, and the images continue into the stories of the people of the New Testament. Before the people go into Egypt, God is sometimes visibly and sometimes silently present at the well. Hagar meets God twice at a well in the wilderness. The first time, described in Genesis 16, Hagar has run away, fleeing from the harshness of Sarai. The second time, in Genesis 21, God provides a well with life-giving water to a desperate Hagar and her son Ishmael (near death in the waterless wilderness). Genesis 24 tells of a servant who finds Rebekah, Isaac's bride-to-be, at a well. Another well serves as a signal of marriage when Jacob meets Rachel at the well where she waters her father's sheep (in Genesis 29), and again in Exodus 2. When the other shepherds try to drive them away, Moses waters the sheep of the seven daughters of Jethro at the well, and subsequently he marries one of the daughters, Zipporah. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with God by a river and receives a new name.

In the prophets, we are reminded of the hope that comes with living water. In Jeremiah 2:13, God reminds the people that God is "the fountain of living water". Later in Jeremiah, we read, "O hope of Israel! O Lord! All who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be recorded in the underworld, for they have forsaken the fountain of living water, the Lord" (Jer 17:13), and again in Zechariah, "On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter" (Zech14:8-9).

Early in the conversation in John 4 which focuses on living water, the Samaritan woman makes sure that Jesus knows that this well belonged to her ancestor Jacob. At Jacob's well, Jacob's descendant does her own wrestling with God. She is unnamed all throughout John's story, but not unchanged. In the traditions of the Eastern Orthodox Church, she is considered to be a saint named Photine (the luminous one, from the Greek φως, "light").



***The Samaritan woman
by the well***
Benedictine Sisters of
Turvev Abbev

The Samaritan woman is different. She is different in gender, religion, race, economic status, personality, and personal lifestyle from Jesus. The woman is not silent, nor is she limited to the private world of women – she has a voice. She moves out into the public arena, into male space. She enters into debate with Jesus about issues and questions that interest her. She does not wait for permission to speak, but she takes the initiative. She knows her tradition well. She participates logically and competently with Jesus in an extensive theological dialogue.

What is so sparkling about the woman that Jesus cannot stop his conversation with her? Jesus seeks her out – she does not go to him. This is the longest private conversation Jesus has with anyone in the New Testament. This man discusses theology openly with a woman. This Jewish man discusses theology with a Samaritan. This Jewish man asks for a drink from the ritually unclean bucket of a Samaritan.

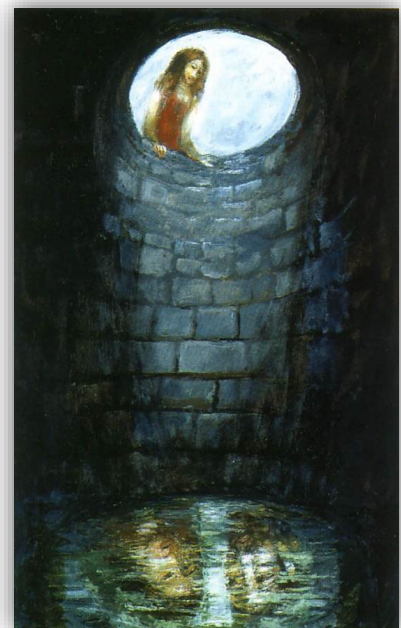
The water given by the Samaritan woman energizes Jesus to move on now in his public ministry to offer his living water and reach out as saviour of the world. Through the dialogue, Jesus grows in his own understanding of his mission. The titles which the woman and her community use show the gradual unveiling of Jesus' identity (Jew, Prophet, Messiah, Saviour of the world). Jesus declares to her that he is the source of living water, "Those who drink of the water that I will give

them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (Jn 4:14). This woman is the first person to whom Jesus openly reveals himself as Messiah, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you” – the first of Jesus’ many “I am” statements in John’s Gospel.

The woman searches to find the place in her own experience where self-knowledge and the knowledge of God meet. She seeks for understanding, beginning with an appeal to her traditions and cultural religious experience. Like a true disciple, she drops everything (symbolized by her water jar essential in her life) and assumes her role as disciple to invite others to Jesus. The simple request for water leads to a theological dialogue on living water. That dialogue leads to Jesus’ acknowledgement that he is the Messiah. Jesus’ declaration leads to the woman’s invitation to her community. The woman’s invitation leads to the community’s transformation. She fills her vessel with living water; she shares living water with the thirsty Jesus; she becomes a vessel of living, liberating, life-giving water. This unmarried, unnamed woman of Samaria becomes an evangelist, a disciple, the first witness to the Messiah, the first missionary to those who were not Jews.

This week, I encourage you to sit and gaze contemplatively on a well or a fountain or a brook or a river (it may be physically present to you or in a painting or photograph). Imagine all the times in your life since your early childhood when you have stood by or walked through living water. Feel the water touching you. Gaze on the nearby rocks of the well or the fountain or the brook or the river. Invite Jesus and the Samaritan Woman to be with you. Let [Jan Richardson’s “Blessing of the Well”](#) flow into your heart and into your spirit:

If you stand at the edge of this blessing
 and call down into it,
 you will hear your words return to you.
If you lean in and listen close,
 you will hear this blessing
 give the story of your life back to you.
Quiet your voice, quiet your judgment,
 quiet the way you always tell your story to yourself.
Quiet all these and you will hear
 the whole of it and the hollows of it:
 the spaces in the telling,
 the gaps where you hesitate to go.
Sit at the rim of this blessing.
Press your ear to its lip,
 Its sides, its curves that were carved out long ago
 by those whose thirst drove them deep,
 those who dug into the layers
 with only their hands and hope.
Rest yourself beside this blessing
 and you will begin to hear
 the sound of water entering the gaps.
Still yourself and you will feel it
 rising up within you,
 filling every hollow,
 springing forth anew.



Insight, Sieger Köder

May your reflections on water and rock bring you more deeply into the contemplative space that is Lent. In the words of Roddy Hamilton, “May God meet us at the wells. May God speak to us in the trysting places. May God renew all that we are and have been, fill us with a new future, inspire us with re-creation, pull us into resurrection, and give us to drink from the promise of heaven.”

GARDEN

All gardens are sacred, but this over and above,
 its grass fed from the bones of goodness,
 a green enclave for reverence and reverie,
 where the spirits murmur
 into the silence and the distant bustle of Dublin days.
 The primary sound of Ireland is not city but water,
 as it trickles, flows, pours and lashes;
 here and now it soothes
 rocks already smoothed by Ireland's great waters,
 carried here to keep this mercy water company.
 Ancient rocks from perhaps the mighty Shannon
 that wends through eleven counties, no hard borders in its way;
 stones are they from the Slaney, the Moy, the Liffey,
 the Foyle, the Barrow, the Lee,
 a stone's throw from the spirit soaked stones of
 Clonmacnoise and Cashel, Lady's Island and Kells,
 rocks that were old when Brigid and Patrick walked on them,
 rocks of sandstone, granite, and limestone
 revealing quartz-gleam in the light,
 layers of time and pressure, patterns of grace and stress,
 the upheaval of volcano, the sediment of sandstone
 compressed with tiny ancient creatures of the oceans,
 and the water-permeable, welcoming grace of the limestone:
 the play and power of water engaged
 with the endurance and amenability of stone.
 Very much at rights with its origins all this,
 but called too by the crafted orb
 to consider the wider earth, the broader waters of the world-
 the orb that holds tendrils and leaves and butterflies,
 gaps to see the sky and feel the air –
 there – put your hands tenderly through the world –
 hints of creatures supple and sinuous, but no snakes, that's certain,
 a globe that furls and unfurls the spirals of life
 and today's tune enticed with that trace of treble clef,
 as it sends the water flowing past names and memories
 from many lands laden with mercy stories,
 all enhanced by the delicate tiled colour of flowers,
 mercy made one art to another, one stone to another,
 one person to another,
 past to present and on it flows.
 And lest we forget,
 turn and see, she who began it all
 sits here at last, the bronzed woman,
 giving and taking the air, inspiring still.
 Go sit with her and listen.

~ Mary Wickham rsm



**The fountain
 in the sacred garden
 in the home
 of Catherine McAuley
 in Baggot's Street, Dublin
 with Mary Wickham's poem –
 most reflective of the themes
 of today's readings
 in the Liturgy of the Word.**