

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:
THIRSTING FOR GOD

Texts: Psalm 63:1-8
(Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-9)

I. Introduction

- A. As I was beginning to ponder Psalm 63 a couple of weeks ago, at about the same time, I happened to see Jerry Seinfeld on the David Letterman show. (video clip)
- B. He's right that "hydration" has become a kind of buzzword in our culture. It's one of those health trends that probably in years gone by, a lot of us didn't think a whole lot about.
 - 1. I remember as a kid spending hours outside on hot summer days playing baseball, basketball, football, etc. As I look back, I guess when we got too thirsty, we'd get a drink, but the whole concept of "staying hydrated" wasn't on our radar screens.
 - 2. Nowadays, this whole idea of the necessity of hydration has been so ground into me that if I forget to take my water bottle out with me to shovel snow I worry about getting dehydrated.
- C. It's also kind of interesting that at about the same time was that other clip that got all of the attention of Senator Marco Rubio pausing in the midst of his speech to take a gulp of water, which kind of symbolically reinforced the obsession our culture has with hydration these days.
- D. I bring this up because the main topic of Psalm 63 is "hydration".
 - 1. The Psalmist says, "I long for you as I would long for a stream of water in the desert."
 - 2. And the thing is, back in those times, in that place, people knew about what it meant to be thirsty. Historians tell us that back then, in the Holy Land, water was scarce and to be treasured. And to be thirsty was often a daily occurrence for a lot of people.
 - 3. But at the same time, it's pretty clear that this is one of those times when we need to peel away a layer of meaning here to get at what the Psalmist is really referring to because it's also pretty clear that we are not just talking about being thirsty in a physical sense. Today we are going to call it "spiritual hydration".
 - 4. And I wonder sometimes with all of our obsession with staying hydrated physically these days, how important we think it is for us to be spiritually hydrated. Do we place an emphasis on our parched souls as much as we do on our parched throats?

- a) For the central questions that Psalm 63 asks us are “How thirsty are we for God?” and “What can we learn from this prayer from one who has obviously drunk from God’s cup many times before, and yet still prays this great prayer of longing—this prayer of someone who even after all of that is still feels the need for some “spiritual hydration”?”
- E. The other thing I’m realizing is how often the topic of “hydration” comes up elsewhere in the Bible. And when it does, when you peel it away, you figure out pretty quickly that the real issue is a spiritual one.
1. We’ve already heard one example this morning in the other Old Testament lesson for today from Isaiah 55.
 - a) After asking the rhetorical question “Is anyone thirsty?” God then warns the people about being hungry and thirsty for the wrong kinds of things—things that don’t really quench our hunger or thirst—things that even just make us more hungry or thirsty.
 - b) Anyone here ever guilty of being hungry and thirsty for what God calls “that which does not satisfy?” These days, it’s almost a badge of honor and success to be thirsting after those kinds of things—wealth, fame, career ladder-climbing.
 2. And then there’s the other story that came immediately to my mind—the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well from John 4. You probably remember it:
 - a) This Samaritan woman of questionable repute comes to a well at high noon on the outskirts of town out in the desert where Jesus just happens to be at that moment.
 - b) She has come because she and her family are thirsty and they need water from the well.
 - c) And as she has this unfolding conversation with Jesus, we begin to learn that she is not only physically dehydrated, but spiritually dehydrated. She has had stuff happen to her in her life that would dehydrate just about anyone.
 - d) For her, the “desert” isn’t just a geographical place, but a way of life.
 - e) And as Jesus’ words to her evolve from a discussion about earthly water to living water, we get the idea that he is the one and the only one that offers not just her, but us too, the kind of water that can hydrate us spiritually.

II. All of this talk and all of these stories about folks being thirsty bring to mind the two realities about spiritual hydration that are true not just in the Psalm this morning, but of life in general. And at first glance, they seem kind of contradictory.

A. That God can quench our thirst.

1. This is what we learn when we are in the desert.
2. When times are tough and our souls are thirsty and we are longing for a drink of the living water, the promise inherent in Psalm 63 is that God and only God can truly quench our thirst.
3. The Samaritan woman knew that kind of thirst, and you get the idea that the writer of Psalm 63 had been out there in the desert more than once at well—that he or she was speaking from direct personal experience
4. And what is also clear is that the main place where the Psalmist has had his spiritual thirst quenched was at the Temple in worship.
5. We saw this last week too—this emphasis that so many of the Psalms have about the importance in going to church. Last week we learned that we grow in our trust of God by doing so, today we find out that here in worship is also where our thirst can at least begin to be quenched.
6. But wherever or however it comes to us, the promise is that when we need it the most, when we are deepest in the desert, when we are the most dehydrated, God offers us a drink of whatever kind of water we need to make it through —the waters of forgiveness, healing, hope, restoration, redemption.

B. But then the other side of the coin is that at some level, when it comes to our everyday relationship with God, we need to stay thirsty.

1. The Psalmist makes the point—even though there have been times when God rescued him from the desert with live-giving water, at the same time, he still “thinks about God before he goes to sleep, and even beyond that, his thoughts turn to God all night long”
2. And even more importantly, he says, “As long as I live, I will pray to you.”
3. Do you get the idea that here is someone who still thirsts for God?
4. Even in the everyday events, even when times are good?
5. You might put it this way--Show me a disciple who isn't thirsty for what God offers each and every day, and I'll show you someone who might be a little comfortable, a little complacent, a little unwilling to always be drinking of the life-giving, sustaining water that only God offers.

6. And as Isaiah pointed out, if we lose our everyday kind of thirst for God and for all that God stands for, it can be easy to fall back into the habit of being thirsty for those things that don't satisfy.
7. You might also put it this way-- this water that God offers us not only has the power to satisfy our thirsts when we are in the desert, but it also has the power to make us want it even when we are in a better place on our everyday journeys through life. And sometimes it is at those times when out of our thirst comes our real growth as disciples.

III. Conclusion

- A. One final image—We were walking through the Grandville mall last weekend and I happened to see the large sign that they've put right above the vending machines where they sell water. (“Hydrate your life” picture).
- B. And having been studying Psalm 63, I took the meaning of that sign a little deeper than the mall folks may have been thinking when they put it up.
- C. “Hydrate your life”—Seems like that's the message of the prayer in Psalm 63.
 1. That as followers of God, as children of God, we are called to hydrate our lives.
 2. That it's not just about the water that we drink to sustain us physically, it's also about drinking the living water offered to us by God through Jesus Christ—the kind of water that can truly hydrate our lives by hydrating our very souls.
 3. And when we drink of that kind of water, in any of the ways that God offers it—in the tough times and the good times of life, it becomes easy to live the life of the Psalmist—to think about God before we go to sleep, to come to worship knowing that our thirsts will be quenched, and to continue to pray to God for as long as we live.
 4. That is what it means to have our lives hydrated by God's living water.
 5. Thanks be to God for his promise to quench our thirsts.
 6. And now as we gather at the table for communion, we will experience another way that God sustains us spiritually as we eat the bread and drink from the cup. It is a reminder that through Christ and what he did for us, our spirits have been quenched not just here and now, but for all of eternity.

