



Sermon for our “Women’s Thankoffering Service
Deacon Ruth Ann Hoy

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First off, I want to thank our WELCA committee for asking me to deliver the sermon to you today. It is such an honor on this special and meaningful day.

This Thankoffering service has been a long-standing one and since 1987, celebrated by the Women of the ELCA. The women in our church use this day to celebrate all of the gifts that we bring here every day of the week. Our volunteers who make these beautiful quilts and prayer shawls, the Cards R Us group, the women who faithfully “man” the food pantry, our altar guild and choir ladies, those who volunteer to answer the telephones and fold the bulletins. What a blessing you all are!

You may have noticed that all three of the readings and today’s psalm are linked by the concept of water, both physical and spiritual.

In today’s Gospel, we heard the story of the woman at the well. When she first meets Jesus, she is suspicious of Him and His intent in befriending her. The longer that they talk, though, the more she realizes that this man is not really who she first thought He was. Then, when Jesus offers the Samaritan woman the gift of “living water” she senses that he is a prophet, or maybe the Messiah and she calls to the other villagers to hear his message of salvation.

The authors of the Bible used water in many different ways to describe this amazing message of salvation.

When God created the heavens and the earth, His first task was to rein in the waters that covered the earth. Today’s psalm talked about God’s power over the waters, causing them to drain down the mountains, setting up boundaries in the forms of oceans, lakes, rivers and streams.

There are several stories in the Bible telling about when God used water to punish or reward His people. In Genesis, we read about the sinners in Noah’s time. They had turned away from Him, worshipping other idols and living god-less lives. God told Noah to get ready to sail and then turned on the faucet and washed those sinners away.

In Exodus, when Moses was leading the Israelites from slavery, God instructed Moses to hit the ground with his staff. On God’s cue, this caused the waters of the Red Sea to part for His chosen people. Once they were safely across, God made the waters crash back

down on Pharaoh and his army. Today's first reading was another story about the Israelites in the desert, complaining about the lack of water. Moses begged God for water and so God commanded Moses to strike a rock with his staff and water poured out. God gives us what we need.

Water is a life-giving force that earth needs to survive. The oceans and lakes nurture their creatures, encouraging the circle of life both in and out of the water. Water makes trees, plants and flowers grow. Animals and people alike need to replenish the fluids in our bodies to exist.

Water, in the form of rain, can be a two-edged sword - it can be used for both good and bad. Only God has the power to regulate the strength of those raindrops, from a sprinkle to a cloudburst or a downpour. When combined with the power of the wind, He can mix up a mighty cocktail, causing waterspouts, hurricanes and even tsunamis! And, if He throws freezing temperatures in as well, we have ice, snow and sleet - oh, my!

Water is also a source of connectivity in society. The ports by the seas, lakes or rivers are the foundations of villages, trade and communication between other cities and countries. Water, or the lack of, can also be a source of trouble - those who have it can lord it over those who don't.

The well in today's gospel was the epicenter of the village for water and even matchmaking! Apparently, back in biblical times, if a young lady was looking for a husband, she hung out at the local well to advertise her availability. That is why the Samaritan woman was so careful to let Jesus know that she was just there for the water, not a husband. Other alliances were made there at the well, not just marital. Meetings were held, trade transpired and gossip reigned supreme.

This "living water" that Jesus offers to us is also a life-giving force - the gift of salvation. We receive this "living water" as it is dripped onto our heads at baptism. Water is a symbol of purity and is used as a symbol to purify our souls. John wrote in verse 13, that Jesus told the woman at the well that "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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."

We need to cherish these gifts of water and nurture them, both the physical water here on earth and the spiritual, "living water" in our souls. We have sadly neglected to care for our water supply - let's strive to take better care of the living water that Jesus sacrificed his life to give to us.

Imagine yourself sitting next to a fresh gurgling stream. Reach out your hand and scoop up some of that chilly water. As it warms in your palm, bathe in the warmth God floods into your heart. Cover yourself with the living water of salvation and thank the Holy Spirit for this blessing.

Amen.