

Two Questions for Life

There are two key questions that stand out for me from today's readings: What do you put your trust in, and how are you going to live your life? And of course the answers are related.

In the reading from Jeremiah the prophet is accusing the people of putting their trust in the wrong things, and abandoning their faith in God. He uses a water metaphor: "You've forsaken God, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for yourselves instead – cracked cisterns that can hold no water."

In a dry environment, like the land the Israelites lived in, a good supply of water was essential. And the best kind was fresh, pure, flowing water from a spring. It was called living water. There are lots of places in the Bible where the importance of water is evident, from the story of Moses striking the rock in the wilderness and water flowing miraculously out for the thirsty Israelites on their long journey to the Promised Land, to the story of Jesus meeting the woman at a well and telling her that he can offer her living water so that she'll never be thirsty again.

We were canoe-camping the last couple of days, up in Massasauga Provincial Park. There is an abundance of water in the lakes but you have to filter it through a hand pump. We didn't have cisterns or tanks, just a couple of bottles. Repeatedly I was down at the lakeside pumping water. Living with city tap water makes you forget how precious water really is. Spend a while away from piped water and these Biblical images come into sharp focus!

Jeremiah says to the people, "God is like the fresh flowing water of a spring – life-giving, pure, abundant; but you've abandoned that, and dug out a cistern instead – you've turned to something that can't give you what you need, can't supply sweet fresh water, and what's more it's cracked so it can't even hold the water you put in it." the way to get around daily, or hourly looking to the lake for water would be to make a storage system. In many places we used to dig out cisterns, or clay lined holes in the ground. But then the water is convenient, but it is stale, dirty and often contaminated. All of Jeremiah's hearers knew all about this.

Water, for us, is not a big issue really. What returns to your mind frequently, as often as I needed to pump water? Many of us worry often about how to pay the bills, buy food and clothes, make sure our children are OK. For many people stashing away savings is a higher priority than making a solid friendship with God. Aloneness is another issue that touches us. Any friend seems better than no friends, and again the deep reliable friendship Jesus offers is put second to the uncertain and changeable, but attractive folks that are offered to us.

The spiritual question coming out of this for us is, what do we look to, to supply our needs? Where do we put our trust? Are we drawing from God, the living water, or from cracked cisterns that will inevitably let us down? When you're spiritually thirsty, or afraid, or unsure, or hurting, do you turn to God? Or do you turn to other things first?

That's Jeremiah's question to us.

The second question comes from the letter to the Hebrews. The author is saying, "OK, you're Christians. You have faith. So how are you going to live?" And then he makes a brief summary. It's

a sort of equivalent to “All I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.” So all we need to know we can read in Hebrews 13:

- Love each other
- Be hospitable
- Care about people in trouble
- Be faithful
- Don't love money
- Be satisfied with what you've got
- Do good
- Share
- Praise God
- Trust God

Christianity when it's being put into practice is a religion of kindness, contentment, compassion, generosity. And it all flows from a core trust in God. In other words, if you get the first question right - What do you put your trust in? - the answer to the second one - How are you going to live your life? - will naturally flow out of it.

The trouble is, a lot of the time we live our lives in a reactive, unexamined way. Yes, we have faith. We try to trust God and drink from the living waters rather than a cracked cistern, but it's easy to live disconnected from that source. I had a bout of insomnia the other night, and the first place my mind went to was all the things I have to take care of now that my vacation is over, and all the busyness that lies ahead in the fall. Pretty soon I was worrying about it all, and sleep was becoming more and more impossible. So you see how I don't practise what I preach!

I think it's a line from the book and the movie, *Eat, Pray, Love*, where the central character is told, “Choose your thoughts as carefully as you'd choose your clothes.”

It's good advice, and it's good spiritual practice. And in order to choose, there has to be a gap between action and reaction - a sacred space big enough to let the stream of living water flow in.

We claim to be people of faith, so we need to live the truth of that - live the peace of mind, the kindness, the generosity, and above all the trust. Trust in God allows the living water to flow.

So next time you're perturbed, or sleepless and worrying, or upset about something, create a small space before you give yourself over to all those thoughts and emotions, and ask yourself how you would live if you really trusted God. Then choose your thoughts and actions carefully and trustfully.

God's grace is an inexhaustible stream of living water.
Come to the fountain.

Amen.

(this is a sermon cooperatively written with Rev Lucy Reid)