

## The Divine Flow

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC

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### SCRIPTURE READING

EXODUS 7:1-7

**17** From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. **2** The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" **3** But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" **4** So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do for these people? They are almost ready to stone me." **5** The LORD said 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. **6** 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." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. **7** He called the place Massah<sup>[a]</sup> and Meribah,<sup>[b]</sup> because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

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JOHN 4:5-15

**5** So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

**7** A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." **8** (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)<sup>[b]</sup> **10** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." **11** The woman said to him, "Sir,<sup>[c]</sup> you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? **12** Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" **13** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** 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." **15** The woman said to him, "Sir,<sup>[d]</sup> give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

God created the Earth, our home, and God made it mostly out of water. Plants, animals, humans... We are born from water, made of water, and we cannot live without it.

Water takes the shape of whatever vessel contains it; ever-changing in size and form and state of matter...

... sounds a whole lot like God, huh?

God is in us like the water that sustains us. God *is* water. So, it's no coincidence that water is often a main feature in scripture. The Bible often turns to bodies of water— rivers and seas— as places of transformation or revelation. We also see water in sacred rituals, like baptism and foot washing.

In the scripture readings today, we come upon two depictions of water: Notice that both of these depictions are specifically of *drinking* water—water *drawn from the Earth*, meant to be received, to become part of those who drink it.

In our first passage, we meet the Israelites in the wilderness— tired and thirsty... and a little bit testy. They needed water. Their *children* needed water. Their livestock, their food source, needed water. They'd all die without it. And just as the people began to ask, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" God himself, through Moses, led them to that water. God was among them.

In our second reading, it is *Jesus* who is thirsty, tired from travel; resting at Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water from that well, and Jesus asks her for a drink. Now, as a Samaritan, and as a woman, she's confused why Jesus is talking to her at all. But, through asking for water, Jesus invites her to open her heart to something more: the "living water"— a water to quench *spiritual* thirst. He says, "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.”

This week, in continuation of our Celtic Spirituality series, I've come to know the Celtic philosopher John Scotus Eriugena, and his musings on the “sacred flow.”

I would like to quote directly from the book Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul for a moment, because I think the wording here is important. Of Eriugena, John Philip Newell writes:

“Celtic wisdom looks for the flow of the divine, deep within everything that has being. It is like a subterranean river coursing through the veins of the universe. If somehow it were dammed or stopped, everything would cease to exist. This sacred flow is not simply a dimension of life that may or may not be there, depending on the moment, the place, the person, or the species. It is the very essence of everything that exists. John Scotus Eriugena awakens us to look for the flow of the divine deep within all things and to release it within ourselves and one another.”

When I consider this “subterranean river,” I am taken back into the two scripture readings today. In both passages we see water that rose up from the ground; life-giving energy flowing from beneath Earth's surface.

In the wilderness, that water was hidden in the rock until God called it forth. At the well, the water had been gathering beneath the soil long before anyone lowered a bucket into it. Beneath the dust and dryness, beneath the weariness and the doubt, there was always water waiting to rise. That is the sacred flow Eriugena speaks of—the divine life moving quietly beneath everything.

In the scripture readings today, the people were tired and thirsty. Jesus, himself, was tired and thirsty. Right now, we are all many things, but I know one thing that most of us have in common right now is that we are all TIRED. We're tired from endless back-and-forth politics that leave us

unsettled and on-edge; tired from sleepless nights taking care of our young children, or elderly partners; tired from the long days at work we endure just to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. We're tired from worrying about the wellbeing of our neighbors, our loved ones, our friends...

And we are thirsty. We thirst for peace. We thirst for rest. We thirst for purpose. We thirst for guidance. We thirst for hope.

And then— we find the hope. In both of our readings, the water was already there, *God* was already there, flowing silently beneath the surface. When the moment came, it rose to meet them; they drank, and their spirits were refreshed.

As we look around ourselves in our daily lives, we too may find the sacred flow, the divine river— within us, and all around us: wrapped in a warm hug, stirred into a meal shared with neighbors, proudly waving a protest sign on the streets, or curled up on the sofa reading our favorite book. We may find the flow in laughter, in music, in friendship, in a compliment from a total stranger, or in the spring flowers poking through the snow.

God is here, abundant as water— strike that water, and drink. And as you drink, feel the hope rise within you, until your spring overflows onto your family, your communities, the world. Let it refresh you, renew you, and empower you.

And as you carry on with your day, carry with you the promise of that wellspring: beneath the dust, beneath the weariness, beneath the dryness, life-giving water is rising. It is rising in us, through us, and around us. Drink deeply, for the Lord is with you— and the flow of God's love never runs dry.

Amen.

Source: Newell, J. P. (2021). *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul: Celtic Wisdom for Reawakening to What Our Souls Know and Healing the World*. HarperOne.