

First Presbyterian Church, Bridgeton, NJ  
Richard E. Sindall, Pastor  
Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 20, 2012  
Service of Baptism and Communion  
Lessons: Jeremiah 2:1-5,10-13 and John 4:5-14

## LIVING WATER WELLING UP

What is living water? Literally, it just meant running water, as from a spring, not the standing water held in a cistern that had caught the rain like a great earthen rain barrel. Cisterns were necessary in a dry land, especially for watering sheep and cattle. It was wasteful not to collect the rain when it did fall, but for drinking, cistern water was second-rate at best. Jeremiah uses living water to represent the LORD God's redemptive love and care for the covenant people and cistern water to represent the stale and scummy life the people made for themselves when they turned away from their God to seek security without faith and prosperity without justice.

What the people of Israel had probably done was to hedge their faith. They lived among peoples who sought the favor of agricultural gods to bless them with rain, fertility, and abundant harvests. In time, the Israelites came to view the LORD God (Yahweh) as the God for extreme situations, especially war, but let themselves be drawn into the culture of sacrificing to the nature gods for prosperity in times of peace.

Does such temptation sound primitive to us? We should not be fooled so easily. Christians are just as subject to this temptation as were the ancient Israelites: for heaven when you die, put your trust in Jesus, but for the blessings of security, comfort, and prosperity in this world, put your trust in wealth, power, and privilege. The temptations are the same. In place of rain that was crucial for life in ancient Israel, just say money, and you have translated the temptation into our time. They needed the spring and fall rains lest their crops fail and they go hungry, just as we today need an income of money lest we fall into poverty and all the shame and suffering that come with it, but where do we put our trust, and to what manner of thinking and living do we commit ourselves and our children? Jesus warns, "Where your treasure lies, there your heart will be also."

I think much of the current mood here in the United States comes from the collapse of our sense of security with its belief that we would always be exceptional in the world, not subject to the dangers and misfortunes that plague other lands. First came the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 that forced us to realize we were not an island of untroubled safety in a dangerous world. Then came the bursting of our bubbles of financial prosperity that had made people imagine, unrealistically, that our economy would just keep growing

forever – that the piper would never have to be paid. Now, we are beginning to sense that the self-appointed lords of prosperity are not trying to share it with us and that our workers and people seeking work have become sacrificial lambs for the false gods of wealth and power.

When Jeremiah and Jesus speak of living water, they are not talking about ways to use divine guidance to gain wealth and security. Both love justice far more than prosperity. Their concern is with our trust and where we put it, our hope and where we find it, our life-energy which (whether we know it or not) is love and how we expend it. Faith, hope, and love are the three things we cannot store up for ourselves because they grow only as they are shared, given, expended for others. They are living water that flows from the redemptive love of God Jesus brings us.

This morning we have had the joyous opportunity to baptize five children into our community of faith, hope, and love. Together with their parents, we have promised to bring them up in the knowledge of God's redemptive love so they learn to put their trust in it as we do. Yes, the world into which these children have been born is harsh, but the world has always been harsh, and we have expressed our determination again here this morning not to be cynical about their future. They belong with us to Jesus Christ and so to God. We have baptized them as a sacramental prayer that they will not grow up to be the people they would become without Christ – people lost to the vain pursuit of wealth and privilege, to selfishness and greed, to the pride and prejudices many employ to hide from their own shame.

God entrusts children to our love and care. From our understanding, forgiveness, and compassion, they learn to trust God and seek life that is real. Jesus' way is not easy. Always we are tempted to try to secure ourselves and get what we desire by taking from others, but that way is folly and leads to evil. People who are not greedy takers get hurt in this world and often seem to be life's losers, but they are not losers, for they are becoming the people God has redeemed them to be as sisters and brothers of Jesus.

This service is a joy for me because I have been enabled to baptize some of our children's children in the church, and I see in these children the promise, not just of a new generation, but of people who will grow up knowing that God loves them and loves other people also, and so they will learn that life is a gift to be shared, not hoarded selfishly. Let us teach them by our love for them and our own passion for justice and kindness in a rough world that God is to be trusted and Jesus Christ is to be followed, that people are to be respected and served not used and tossed away when they have been used up, and that life is indeed every day a gift from God to be shared. God is faithful, and Jesus Christ is risen to new life he shares with us. The seemingly foolish and impractical way of faith, hope, and love will be refreshed and renewed by the living water that wells up in us and among us for life that is meaningful and ever promising and joyous to live. Amen.