

In today's Exodus 17 reading Moses is told to take the staff he'd used years ago to do God's work with his hands. God parted the sea as Moses hit the waters with his staff. Teamwork! One has holy power. The other, humble willingness to go along with God's odd ways.

Now God is up to it again, asking Moses to use this same staff to hit a rock so water will flow for thirsty people. First thing I thought in reading this was, How would Moses lay hands on this staff he hadn't used in years. Do you know where things are you haven't used in years? I can hear Moses, "Where'd I leave that thing?" I would be asking that!

When I visited the Lutheran Synod of Rwanda in 2006 with a group from the Sierra Pacific Synod, Pastor Elidard and I exchanged gifts. I was to preach at his church in Kagitumba - west of Tanzania, south of Uganda.

Among other gifts, I brought him a handmade stole, like this one made by a member of Faith in Chico. One of the gifts Pastor Elidard gave me was this Moses staff. One for me and one to take home to my husband.

A Moses staff is an important visual for them – a reminder that God uses us to do God's work – like God used Moses to strike the sea and the rock.

God could have opened the sea or given water on God's own, but as Luther taught, God chooses to work with us rather than without us. The ELCA's motto is *God's Work. Our hands*. God uses our participation.

Water from the rock isn't, however, really a miracle story – as if water gushes out of nowhere. Water tables in deserts used to be massive. Water would flow from higher elevations through rocks to bring water to lower lands. Waterfalls are water flowing through rocks – downward.

That California's water table is low is why we're still in a draught after all this glorious rain. We've overused what had been abundant. God created the world with enough of everything if we'd honor and preserve the balance God set in place.

Moses hitting the rock and water gushing out is Moses tapping into what's already there. That's what Jesus came to help us do and be – an

alternative community going along with God's out-of-the-box, counter-cultural ways – like mercy and forgiveness and second chances.

These different-from-the- norm ways flow when we just tap into them – even if the world doesn't buy into things like mercy, forgiveness and second chances. As God's alternative community in the world, the church is called to help each other tap into this strange way. In it is our health and the joy Jesus came to usher in.

Today's gospel finds Jesus resting at the well when a Samaritan woman comes to draw water. Jesus finds in her an unexpected willingness to tap into what's really real.

Often conversations stay on the surface. How rare to talk with neighbors, friends, even family about the grace that's really a-foot. The truth is, God in Christ *is with us*. *Wow!* But that hardly comes into conversation.

Grace is the most incredible thing there is about life – that God in Christ chooses daily to bring good out of evil, hope out of despair, second and more chances out of mis-steps. We believe God does this. That's why we celebrate Christmas. But do we trust it?

Today it's Christmas in March. Every day is Christmas in that God is as present as Jesus was in the Bethlehem manger – as present as Jesus was for the woman at the well.

Jesus and the Samaritan woman talk about living water – fresh flowing grace that's present for us always through Christ in whose name we're baptized. The thing is – this living water isn't just for joyful times. In fact, it's especially for the hard times, the hard places, when we're dealing with disappointment, grief, guilt, fear, or whatever.

I love how Phil Yancey puts it: *“Grace, like water, flows downward... No matter how low we sink, grace flows to that lowest part.”*

Grace, this living water Jesus speaks of to the woman at the well – *and to us* – is love from God flowing always into the lowest points in our lives. Jesus meets the woman at the well at an obviously low point – suggested by her coming alone to the well in the heat of the day.

We don't know what her situation was. It may not be her fault at all that she comes alone to the well in the noonday heat. That would be highly unusual for a first century woman – coming alone at the hottest time of the day. Wells were gathering places of fellowship.

But there's Jesus – without judgment – speaking with her in the heat of the day – at a low point in her life.

As we gather in worship, we have the opportunity for this conversation with Jesus too. We too can move beyond the surface to the depths of what's really going on in our lives.

We can do this because God knows and loves us just as we are – whether we share what's up or not. God is boundless compassion, peace for our suffering hearts, loving us more than we can fathom.

As you come to Holy Communion today, I invite you – before or after you receive Communion – to extend your walk by passing by our Baptismal font. We've made it appear overflowing with water – because in reality it is overflowing with living water flowing into wherever low places there are in your heart and life.

Dip a finger into the font. Mark yourself with the sign of the cross. Trust Jesus to anoint you with health. You are beloved. God meets you at your noon-day need.

May this promise be in you a spring of water, gushing up to eternal life.

Amen

*Pastor Peg, LCM, LA*