

Unclogging the Wells

Genesis 26:17-25, John 7:37-38

These past few weeks we have been enjoying having Bobby and Amanda with us before they head back to Honduras this week. And of course it has been a special joy and blessing to have little Bobby with us as well. Bobby is about a year and half now and he doesn't say a whole lot of words yet, but one of the first words he learned was "agua". I think it's because where they live in Honduras their water is delivered by a man riding down the street and delivering this 5 gallon bottles of water to customers whose supply is getting low. And so just about every day you will hear the sound of his voice yelling as he goes down the street: "Agua, Agua." (Show video clip of water delivery in Honduras)

Agua, or water, or as I grew up in South Jersey saying: "wooder" is a precious commodity that we often take for granted. For so many people in the world do not have a sufficient water supply or the availability of clean drinking water. For when it comes down to matters of physical survival, there is no more basic commodity than water. We can live without many things, but water is not one of them. This past month's Grounds for Good Coffeehouse mission was Hydromissions, which is a ministry that seeks to help communities to find and develop a clean and sanitary water supply. We had the privilege of hearing from Jennifer Lorch, founder of this mission tell us all the different countries she has traveled in, working with community leaders to deal with this critical need for clean water. One of the most important things they do is teach persons how to dig wells and find a fresh water supply. It is a vital ministry and I was glad our church had the opportunity to support their work. Finding water and digging wells is also one of the kinds of missions we support through our United Methodist apportionments.

The story of Abraham and Isaac also involved the digging of wells. When Abraham died, he left all his possessions to his favorite son, Isaac. By this act of inheritance, Isaac became a very wealthy man. He was owner of great tracts of land, great herds of cattle, and through his hard work and stewardship, got even wealthier. He seemed to have everything, but if you lived in that land and had trouble getting water, it wouldn't matter who much you owned. Without water,

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you weren't going to make it. And so in this story, you have Isaac going out to inspect his land and he makes a tragic discovery. He long time arch enemies had deliberately thrown dirt into his wells and the wells became clogged, dirty pits. Isaac's enemies knew that regardless of his wealth, if his wells were destroyed, he could be defeated. The Scripture goes on to tell us Isaac's response. Genesis 26:18 says: "And Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Abraham his father. In other words, Isaac went about the task of unclogging the wells. It would be an arduous task, but one that had to be done.

As I think of the messages in the New Testament I want to note some of the parallels of this OT story for our spiritual life. Because water is not only a physical substance, it also becomes an important symbol of our faith. We acknowledge that everytime we have a baptism. How water is a symbol of cleansing and new life. Water is often a symbol of life in the Bible because we know we have to have water to live. As I was thinking about this story, I was wondering: What about the clogged wells in our lives. Spiritually what needs to be unclogged in order to sustain and refresh our spiritual life? Where do we need to clean out the wells, and where do we need to dig new wells?

And what is required is that I must look at the supply lines in my life and look for those areas that need to be unclogged. Because the fact is that just like Isaac, the arch enemy of our souls looks to clog up the wells of our hearts. There are those things that keep the water, that life of the spirit, from flowing freely in us. One application I see is the dirt of unconfessed sin. That in our life, we know we have gone against the ways of Christ, or we have been disobedient in our following of the Lord and it has been getting in the way of spiritual freedom and victory. We try to ignore it, put dealing with it aside, but the fact remains, the well is clogged and in danger of going dry. We find that we are being dishonest with ourselves, pretending that this condition is not harmful. But whether it is an attitude of greed, lust, prejudice, selfishness, or whatever, we know in our hearts that it is obstructing the flow of the spirit. It is a clogged well.

And how do you unclog the well? It requires getting rid of the dirt or digging a

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new well. Spiritually that means confessing our sins to God. Having a repentant heart, and allowing God's forgiveness and grace to make it possible for us to begin again. To once again let the water to flow freely. The book of I John gives us the spiritual formula for an unclogged well. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it like this: " Sin wants to remain unknown. In confession, the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart." That which has been clogging up our lives has been brought into the light. And so the question we all have to ask ourselves is: What has been clogging the wells of my spiritual life? What is it that I need to bring before God in order that allow the clean water to flow?

I also see an interesting parallel to what we talked about last week in the service of healing and wholeness. You remember that we spoke about the things we need to surrender to God in order to be made whole. When I think about clogged wells, I also wonder if part of our struggle is not only the sin, but all of the things we throw into the well of our lives that gets things stopped up. I'm talking about how our life can get so cluttered with many things, sometimes even good things that we do not allow God's Spirit to flow freely. Our busyness hinders our walk with the Lord. We fill our lives with many things, and we find that the spiritual well becomes a shallow pool and we don't have the resources to handle life effectively.

Richard Leider makes this very point in his book Repacking Your Bags – Lighten the Load for the Rest of Your Life. He tells the story of leading a backpacking safari in East Africa. He said: "I had a state of the art backpack loaded with every gadget imaginable. My group was accompanied by a Masai chief who carried only a knife and a stick. At the end of the day, I was completely exhausted while the chief was fresh as a daisy. He asked me to show him what was in my pack and as I did, explaining why each item was crucial and he would ask, "but does all of this make you happy." I ended up leaving about half of my stuff in the Masai village. Actually I could have left more." Sometimes unclogging the wells of our life requires getting rid of things that really aren't that important. They may be material things, but they could be

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non-material things as well, commitments we've made, the endless responsibilities we have said yes to, sometimes very good things that may require a re-ordering of our priorities, so that we make sure we are taking care of the most important things, like those things that pertain to the soul. That this unclogging would allow our spiritual wells to run deeper and give us the resource to have the personal strength to face the challenges of life.

This morning I invite you to examine your spiritual well. Take a closer look at those things that may be clogging the well. Bring before the Lord, anything that is keeping that spiritual water from flowing freely. There may be unconfessed sin that we need to openly and honestly bring to God and find God's forgiveness. It may be a re-ordering of priorities to make sure we are taking care of our souls and allowing ourselves to be fed spiritually. In this beginning of a new year, can we take a closer look at those things that have been filling our wells?

Let's do some spiritual digging. Removing that which has been a hindrance or maybe it's digging some new wells. As Isaac struggled with his enemies, he eventually dug new wells. The same may be needed in your life. That God may be leading you to a new place in your spiritual journey. It could be a ministry that God wants you to consider, a willingness to accept a new challenge in the living of your faith. It might seem like a risk for us, but God wants to give us the courage to dig new wells. E.M. Bounds wrote a classic book called [The Preacher and Prayer.](#) In it he talks about this approach to stepping into new territory. He writes: "We need to be on the stretch for God." He is not talking about human effort where we wear the "we try harder" button, but he is referring to that posture and stance of the soul which refuses to take comfort in the shape of things as they are, which refuses to settle with one's spiritual status quo.

What is required? Our openness to the Spirit of God in our lives. It is taking Jesus' words to heart: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" That sounds like an unclogged supply to me. Do we hear God speaking to our hearts calling out: "Agua, Agua." Let's start digging and find that fresh supply of God's water, the

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Spirit of the Lord moving in us and flowing from us.