

A Disciple's Devotion: Thirsting for God

Psalm 63:1-8

Georgetown Presbyterian Church

Rev. Stephen H. Wilkins

March 7, 2010

I don't know about you, but I feel like there is a restlessness in contemporary society, a restlessness manifested by a deep-seeded longing and desire for meaning and purpose. It's something in our hearts that cannot be satisfied through mere intellect. It's something in our hearts that cannot be fulfilled through wealth and material well-being. It's something in our hearts that cannot be satisfied outside of the life of faith. There is a hunger, a thirst arising out of the depths of our being. Marjorie Thompson, a Presbyterian minister and author who has written much about spiritual disciplines, says, "There is a hunger abroad in our time, haunting lives and hearts. Like an empty stomach aching beneath the sleek coat of a seemingly well-fed creature, it reveals that something is missing from the diet of our rational, secular, and affluent culture."¹

Indeed, there is a hunger and a thirst abroad in our time, revealing something missing from our rational, secular, and affluent culture. And yet the hunger and thirst of our time is not unique to our time. Thousands of years ago, a desperate Israelite king put his finger on exactly the same longing: "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water."²

What would make David, who had earlier in his life been referred to as a man after God's own heart, say something like that? How could David, who had also penned such beautiful words of profound faith such as "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..."³ or "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear,"⁴ or "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places."⁵—How can the same man who penned such lovely and spiritually deep words also cry out, "my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water"?

The superscription of the psalm helps us answer this question. The psalm is ascribed to David, "When he was in the desert of Judah." And the last three verses of the psalm seem to hint that someone was pursuing David, to seek his life. There are only two times that we are aware of that David was fleeing someone in the wilderness of Judah. The first was when he was on the run from King Saul. The second was when David was being pursued by his own son, Absalom, who sought to overthrow David as king of Israel. Since the last verse of the psalm implies that it is as King that David writes this psalm, then we'll assume the second circumstance.

David was on the run in the wilderness. Several years prior, David had cast Absalom out of the family for raping one of his half-sisters. Although David later forgave Absalom, Absalom never felt part of the family, and he certainly understood that he had lost any right to the throne. So Absalom quietly gained the favor of the people,

¹ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), p. 1.

² Psalm 63:1

³ Psalm 23:1

⁴ Psalm 27:1

⁵ Psalm 16:5-6

and when the time was right he had himself declared to be king. David, fearing for his life, fled into the wilderness and hid while his men fought Absalom's men. Eventually, Absalom's men were defeated, and Absalom was killed, and David returned to Jerusalem, though deeply grieved at the loss of his son.

But while David was on the run, he became aware of this deep thirst within. Certainly the Judean wilderness, one of the harshest places on earth, would give him an idea of how deep and severe the thirst was. Not only was his body parched from the lack of water, but as David found himself torn away from Jerusalem, where he could enter the tabernacle and worship in the presence of God, David even more keenly recognized that his soul was parched. He missed having God in his life. He longed for the presence of God in his life. David was thirsty for God.

On some level, I can understand how David felt. There have been times in my life when I missed God, when I wanted the presence of God in my life. After I received my MBA at the University of Texas, I returned to my hometown of San Antonio for my first job, on the staff of Arthur Andersen & Co. Upon my return to San Antonio, I became actively involved in my church, with regular attendance at worship and Sunday school, regular Bible studies, and weekly fellowship times. I felt the spirit of God moving in my life. It was a time when I found myself drinking daily from the fountain of God's presence.

But not long after I started with Arthur Andersen, I was sent to Phoenix for a four-month assignment. I was taken out of what was for me a spiritual oasis, and I suddenly found myself in a strange land, separated from something that had become very dear to me. I was miserable. I missed my church. I missed my friends. Not only was I stationed in the desert, but I also felt like spiritually I was back in the barren and dry wilderness. I was thirsty for God.

Indeed, there is a hunger and a thirst abroad in our time, revealing something missing from our lives. The 63rd psalm identifies that for us as a thirst for God—a thirst that is deep down within every human being created in the image of God and estranged from God because of our sinfulness. And the 63rd psalm gives us some indications of what it takes to quench that thirst. The bottom line is, it takes a lifelong engagement of all our being with God.

It takes an earnest seeking for God to satisfy our thirst. David says he seeks God. But really the tone of the psalm is more than just a "looking for" kind of seeking; rather, I get the sense that the kind of seeking of which David speaks is a hot pursuit. David is desperately searching for the presence of God in his life. He's not just sitting under a tree and wishing that God would come to him; he's searching high and low, looking all around, desperately in pursuit of even a glimpse of God at his side.

It also means we engage with God with every part of our being. That's what David did—he made it a determination of his heart to engage with God in every way, totally and completely. The vocabulary of the psalm indicates that it is with body, mind, and spirit that we have to engage with God, because every fiber of our being longs for the presence of God. It is with our eyes that we see God; it is with our lips that we praise God, with our mouths that we sing of God's glory; it is with our hands that we proclaim the majesty and steadfast love of God; it is with our minds that we remember God and we reflect on God's gracious and loving acts. And it is with our soul that we cling to God with the tenacity of someone holding onto a lifeline for dear life. It takes a complete engagement with God of all we are, if we're going to quench our thirst.

But this Lenten season, it would behoove us to wonder, To what degree do we really thirst for God? Surely we have this restlessness and this longing for meaning and purpose in life, but how many of us really turn to God to satisfy that restlessness? We have voracious appetites for more in our lives—more space in our homes,

bigger cars, larger kitchens, better-paying jobs. Do we long for God with the same appetite? Do we want more of God in our lives?

We thirst, but do we thirst for God? Do we seek after God with the same intensity and total abandon as David did? We're thirsty, but are we turning to God through Jesus Christ to quench our thirst?

What is it that the prophet asked in this morning's first reading—"Why do you spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?"⁶ What is it that you are pursuing, what is it that you are seeking to satisfy your thirst?

"Listen to me," says the Lord, "and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."⁷ You see, there is a right direction for our seeking, there is a right orientation for our longing. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he's near..."⁸

In the gospel according to John, Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman at a water well. The woman shows signs of longing for meaning and purpose. Jesus suggests that maybe her search has been misdirected toward the men in her life, of which there have been many. Jesus points to the well and says to the woman, "Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."⁹

My friends in Christ, every one of us is thirsty. The question that we must ask of ourselves, not only in this season of Lent but in all seasons of our lives, is, Where do you turn to quench your thirst? You can turn to wells that will dry up. You can turn to wells that make you come back for more but never satisfy.

Or you can turn to Jesus, and drink him into your whole being.

"O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water."

To those who thirst, our Lord says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters..."

Where do seek satisfaction for your thirst?

Amen.

⁶ Isaiah 55:2a

⁷ Isaiah 55:2b

⁸ Isaiah 55:6

⁹ John 4:13-14