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Title: *Walk for Water*

Texts: *John 13:31-35; John 7:38*

John 13:31-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 7:38

"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."

"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." That is the theme of this year's General Assembly, which will be held in Minneapolis this summer.

What does that text mean?

In Sunday school... bible study... and youth group... it has been my approach thus far in my ministry to ask each of you: "What do *you* think the text means?" I don't want to know what the theologians say... the scholars... I don't want to know what the commentaries say... no, not yet... I want to know what you believe the text means.

My favorite professor at Princeton Seminary was Dr. Robert Dykstra, Professor of Practical Theology. Robert Dykstra taught me a huge amount about preaching. His book *Discovering a Sermon* changed my life! It really hit home for me the value... the need... for prophetic, personal, pastoral preaching. He was transparent... he was vulnerable... in a way that encouraged me to be honest and open in my spiritual pilgrimage... and to explore times when I might be expose the interior of my life... and to be vulnerable... to support and encourage others.

One thing Dr. Dykstra said to me was: “In preparing for a sermon, do not read the commentaries on the scripture until the end of the week.” He said: “Find your own voice in the text... make your own interpretation before leaning on the insight and scholarship in the commentaries.”

Most Sundays I follow Dr. Dykstra’s advice.

I also apply his wisdom when I lead bible study and youth group. I say: “What do *you* think the text means?”

Read the commentaries... study Reformed Theology... tune up to the language of our tradition, which makes us who we are, but be sure to find your voice in the tradition... find your voice... your unique interpretation of the scriptures.

Speak your understanding of the scriptures...
to God,
to yourself,
and grace others with your understanding...
and interpretation...

Know... and embrace... that your understanding will evolve and change over time.

Do this and your faith will grow...
and you will find yourself closer to God.

When General Assembly invited youth groups around the country to do a film to interpret the text: “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water...” of course I asked the youth: “What do *you* think the scripture means?”

Their reflections are rich in meaning; they reveal the work of the Holy Spirit working in us... and in our community of faith.

Patrick Lane said: “I think the scripture means that the water from the believer’s heart, in a sense, flows around those in need.”

Due to the inspiration of this congregation... and our involvement in Living Waters for the World... and Clean Water Ministry, I believe, the youth were initially drawn to those two words in the text “living water.” Those words were very potent for them.

(As many of us know... and many participated) The youth organized a *Walk for Water*, which took place on Saturday, April 17 to raise funds and awareness for Living Waters for the World.

We walked from the church to the levee and back – roughly 6 kilometers – which is the average walk that people in the developing world have to do every day to get water that sometimes isn’t even clean.

On the day of the walk (and afterwards) I heard some wonderful reflections.

Georgia Clarke said: “We take water for granted, but when we were on the walk it made us realize how much other people enjoy clean water.”

Ann Klein Striebeck said: “On our walk to the levee and back... we walked in a straight path, but other people walk through mountains and hills.”

Another walker shared: “On our walk, we were able to enjoy good conversation with our friends while many people do that walk every day alone.”

Kendall Cox said: “When we were walking, we met a couple of guys on Main St. They saw our procession and asked why we were walking. (I responded: ‘To raise awareness and funds for clean water needs around the world.’) One of the men said that future wars will be fought not over oil, but water. We all have to have water... and clean water!” He said: “This is something the whole community should be in on; they were happy to hear that our youth were doing this.”

Lesedi Chambers said: “As Christians, it is especially important to help those who are less fortunate than us... and I think the Walk for Water was a great way to do that. And it relates to the scripture ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall

flow rivers of living water' because God gave us the Holy Spirit to be like water for our souls, but he also wants us to share that water with others in the world. The *Walk for Water* provided money to give people clean water, but also I think it will provide hope which is like water for the soul."

Thanks to this congregation we were able to raise \$1,000 on the Walk for Water – in addition to the \$13,000, which we raised at this year's Mardi Gras Madness!

But I want to focus on something that Lesedi said which I find to be very profound. She said: "The walk will provide money to give people clean water, but *also I think it will provide hope which is like water for the soul.*"

Hope is like water for the soul. And how do we offer up hope? I think we offer hope to our brothers and sisters in the developing world by getting to know them... by seeking a relationship, not simply by doing something for them that we think they need.

For the Session Room Class a couple of months ago, I taught a class on a sermon by theologian Jurgen Moltmann. In his sermon, he shared a story: "In 1975 a well-known European church leader came to the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi armed with large donations of money. He invited the heads of the African churches to come and discuss how these gifts could best be distributed. They never appeared. Why not? They gave this as their reason: 'We don't want your money. We want you yourselves. We certainly need help, unfortunately. But we need brothers and sisters even more. Who are you?' they asked us."¹

I believe that Walking for Water was a way that we were able to walk with our brothers and sisters throughout the world who walk over 6 kilometers to get water every day. One of our mantra's during the walk was: "*We walk because they walk.*"

In our planning, the youth did not think it was enough to simply raise funds for clean water; they also wanted to raise awareness, which they saw equally as important.

¹ Jurgen Moltmann. *The Pharisee and the Tax Collector*. Scene One.

Raising awareness...

actions that help us to live in solidarity with one another...
this is what offers hope that is like water for the soul!

So often times in mission, we ask the question: “What are we going to do? How will we serve others?” but really that question: “What are we going to *do*?” In my ministry, I have seen that question make people sick.

“What are we going to do?” It’s not a bad question. In fact, I think it is an important question. And yet, mission is not just something we do. It is our calling... for mission to be the core of who we are. We do ministry... we serve other..., but we do so in authentic, genuine, loving relationship with them.

How will you seek an authentic, genuine, loving relationship with those in need?

How will you – the people of God – seek solidarity with those in the developing world?

When you find your answer(s)... and embrace actions of care and compassion... when your relationship to your community and world strengthens... your work will not be in vain, but – as Lesedi says – you will be providing hope which is like water for the soul.

“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” What does this text mean *to you*?

To interpret the scriptures... you do not need to ask an expert what it means. You do not need to read the commentaries, nor do you need to ask a pastor what the scripture means, but when you read the scriptures, God will speak to you... and that’s a promise.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.