

## Let the Waters Be Separated – by Rev Martin Beukes

**Prayer:** from Ps 63<sup>1</sup>

O Love, You are my Beloved, and I long for You, my soul thirst for You; All that is within me thirsts, as in a dry and barren land with no water. So I have called out to You in my heart, sensing your power and glory. Because of your wonderous Love is Life in me, my lips will praise You. I would radiate your Love as long as I live, becoming a blessing to others in gratitude to you. Amen

**HYMN: StF 494 Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing** - Robert Robinson H&P 517

<p>Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace; streams of mercy never ceasing call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious measure sung by flaming tongues above; O the vast, the boundless treasure of my Lord's unchanging love!</p> <p>Here I find my greatest treasure: 'Hither by thy help I've come,' and I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.</p>	<p>Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God; he, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.</p> <p>O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be! Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; take my heart, O take and seal it, seal it from thy courts above!</p>
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### Confessions:

Lord Jesus, you are the spring of water which wells up within us, the very giver of life. Yet most often we do not desire your life-giving water, but other things. Forgive us our desire to be loved, our desire to be honoured, our desire to be praised, our desire to be preferred over others.

By your grace enable us to give love more ready than we want to receive, to honour others and their needs above our own, to give praise freely at the successes of others' efforts, and to prefer the comfort of the downtrodden than comfort for ourselves. Let the spring which flows from your throne well up inside of us to bring a fullness of life which flows out into the lives of each person who you put across our path.

### Say the Lord's Prayer

*Hear the word's which Jesus spoke to so many he encountered, and may the ring true in your ears today, "Your sin is forgiven, go in peace".*

**Reading:** John 4:4-15

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<sup>1</sup> The Psalms for Praying – Nan C. Merrill

<p>I heard the voice of Jesus say: 'Come unto me and rest; lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast.' I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad, I found in him a resting-place, and he has made me glad.</p> <p>I heard the voice of Jesus say: 'Behold, I freely give the living water; thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live.'</p>	<p>I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream; my thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.</p> <p>I heard the voice of Jesus say: 'I am this dark world's Light; look unto me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright.' I looked to Jesus, and I found in him my star, my sun; and in that light of life I'll walk, till travelling days are done.</p>
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**Reading:** Genesis 1: 1-8 and Revelation 21:1-7

**Sermon:** Water and Life

I need to make a confession. I love water, especially a long bath. I do most of my writing in the bath; I run a bath when I need time to think and pray through something difficult; I even compose most of my sermons in the bath. It is a happy place for me, in the water. But don't worry, as I sit and write this sermon, I am fully clothed, sitting in my comfy wingback chair, having *just* gotten out of a bath.

As you may guess I am very much a water baby and it runs in the family. My sister and I could both swim before we could run, and so we spent every possible moment we could swimming. We would often come home in the cold Johannesburg winters and go for a swim before my dad could get home to shout at us swimming in the cold.

I spent most of my teenage years in the sea; I went bodyboarding at sunrise almost every day for four years; I surfed with dolphins; twice I nearly died in the sea; three times saw sharks a little too close up. Still, I never lost my love being in the water. Though with age, sharks have come to worry me a little more. Having grown up on the very warm east coast of South Africa and running and playing on the beach in the hot sun, there is one thing I can tell you is more important about water than swimming - because I know what it feels like to be so thirsty that you become dizzy and disoriented - desperate for any drink.

Israel is hot. I once heard a preacher who had made the mistake of leading a tour group to Israel in September describe it something like this: 'They call it the Holy Land. There is nothing holy there. It is just hot. Hot, hot, hot! It isn't the holy land, but it is so hot it *will* make you pray!' I wonder what this poor woman in our reading from John's Gospel must have felt like, walking through the heat of the midday sun to fetch water. How thirsty must she have been? How sick of going to the well alone? How desperate for access to life-giving water which was a little easier to come by? She knew what it was like to be so thirsty that you become dizzy and disoriented - desperate for any drink.

This week we look at the phrase from the creation story "Let the water be separated." This speaks about the creation of sea and sky, or maybe more accurately water and air – the two most important things for sustaining our lives. This picture of the waters being separated into sea and sky is borrowed from the Babylonian creation myth which this piece of scripture seeks to refute. Scripture is telling its first readers who knew the Babylonian story, that it was not quite the way the Babylonians made it out to be.

At the opening of the creation story, there is an image borrowed from the Babylonian story: there is an endless ocean, primordial chaos, and scripture describes it with a wonderful rhyme in the Hebrew. Most translations render it as 'formless and void' but my Hebrew professor used to translate

it as 'emptiness upon emptiness.' You can almost see the writer trying to describe staring into the deep darkness of the water: Emptiness upon emptiness. This part is borrowed from the Babylonian myth, but there is something more important than the emptiness of the water: The Spirit of God hovers over the water! The water is a tool in the Spirit's hands.

When we jump from the beginning of Scripture to the end, in Revelation 21, we see something of what water really means in Scripture. It is not primordial chaos, like in the Babylonian creation myth. Rather in the beginning God brings life out of the water, and at the end of Scripture, the source of all life is the river which flows from the throne of God. Water in scripture is not just something we need to drink to survive, it is a symbol of God's Life within you, God's life-giving power.

The authors of scripture lived in a time and a place where they had an acute awareness of the importance of water. Rain for them was the provision of life from God. For us, is rain just another cold damp, slightly annoying day in Britain? The woman at the well had this same acute understanding of water's importance. This raises two questions for me: What does it mean for us to live with God's Life-giving Water within us? And what does this symbol of life-giving water mean when we are 60% water and our planet's surface is 70% water?

I once sat in a lecture by a well respected Methodist minister where he tried to explain how he saw the mission of the Church and the unfolding challenges of the 21st Century. After all the clever ideas and struggles identified by peoples from the crowd sharing their ideas, finally, he settled on one task for the church. To preserve water. He even went as far as to posit that if the world were to descend into another world war, it would likely be over access to clean water. While 70% of the earth surface is covered by water, only 3% is drinkable., but 70% of that is frozen and 29% is inaccessibly underground. So 0.3% of the water on earth is given to us to sustain life. Our challenge as those who have experienced 'the spring of water which wells up to eternal life' may just need to focus a little more on the normal physical water we have been gifted by God.

Most of the cities on the planet are built near or on a water source. The famous exception is Johannesburg because at the time it grew people thought who needs water if you have gold. There is a reason people have sought to live near water. We need it, and if we can settle near it we will. But this raises some issues. Because most of the population of the world live near bodies of drinking water 60% of people on the planet live in areas of stressed access to water. The amount of freshwater can't sustainably meet demand. Also, where there are lots of people, there will be lots of waste. The bodies of water with the largest number of people on them are also the most polluted.

Pollution means our water poisons us. In some places, disease is rife because it is in the water. In other places, the water is so full of chemicals it is slowly killing the populations. But worse than us dying from the damage we have done is the ways we are throwing the world out of balance.

"Figures for England from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee have shown that 68 per cent of rivers that are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in a bad condition, leading to a dramatic decline in wildlife. In the Twentieth century, freshwater fish have had the highest extinction rate worldwide... eight out of ten freshwater species has been wiped out!"<sup>2</sup> And this to say nothing of our oceans filling up with plastic waste which at this point seems likely to outlive humanity on earth. If we continue to waste our most precious resource and continue to kill the species that keep it healthy, how will we survive?

This brings me back to my slightly random mention of Johannesburg earlier. Why are we destroying the life-sustaining gift of water? Because the attitude which taught the early prospectors 'you do not need water if you have gold' is exactly how we live today. Humanity on the whole is far more interested in having wealth than in having fresh water to drink. We may say otherwise, but our actions speak louder than our words.

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<sup>2</sup> Say Yes To Life – Ruth Valerio, P.40-1

Which, in turn, brings me back to a desperately thirsty woman at a well in Israel. Standing in the midday sun, she is asked for a drink. She is confused, why would a Judean want a drink from her. But, as they talk, Jesus chooses to offer her the Water of Life instead of normal drinking water. Out of God's self-giving love, she is offered something so much more than just water to drink. This image runs throughout the scriptures, and it is one of the last promises in the bible. Millions of people call on Jesus' name today, and throughout history, who have said yes please to the water from the throne of God. As Jesus' followers, we would even claim that our lives are sustained by this water, but why then are we not looking after the first water which God gave to sustain our lives and for our bodies to drink.

**Prayer:** (By Fwangmun Oscar Danladi from 'Yes to Life' by Ruth Valerio)

Dear Lord, it is exciting to know that you are the very source of life, including water. We praise and adore you for the gift of water that sustains all life and constantly reminds us that You are the fountain of living water.

Teach us to use it thankfully, to consume it consciously, and to protect its purity.

Father, forgive us for the time we took it for granted. We confess our attitudes of greed, dominance, and insensitivity towards your beautiful creation, and particularly towards water. Lord, forgive us for the time we have used water selfishly, unwisely, and without regard for how it affects others. Forgive us for the actions we have taken to harm the different sources of water around us.

Help us to see the effect of our actions not only on our immediate surroundings but also on people living in places plagued by drought. Help us to be conscious of our daily use of water; help us to be more willing to reflect on its symbolic nature and the lessons it teaches about you and your sustaining power.

Please guide us on how to protect the water bodies you made for your glory. Amen.

**SONG:** [StF 544 As the Deer](#) - Martin J. Nystrom Not in H&P – see alternatives at end

As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you. You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.  <i>You alone are my strength, my shield, to you alone may my spirit yield. You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.</i>	I want you more than gold or silver, only you can satisfy. You alone are the real joy-giver and the apple of my eye.  You're my friend and you are my brother, even though you are a king. I love you more than any other, so much more than anything.
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### **Prayers of Intercession:**

*Take a few minutes to say your own intercession aloud or in silence. Consider some of these needs our world faces:*

*For the multitudes people who struggle for the basic necessities of life, especially water. For all those who are struggling with failing mental health because of COVID, the angry, weary, lonely people who are struggling to carry on. For over-tired key workers who for the past year have worked harder than they ever believed possible, and who don't always have the energy to carry on. For the many millions for whom the past year had been filled with grief, the loss of loved ones and the pain caused by the many life changes the pandemic has brought on.*

**In the silence Lord, we ask Holy Spirit, fill us once more. Renew in us a compassion for the brokenness of our world, turn our care out from ourselves to the manifold needs of your creatures and creation. Jesus, we call upon your promise in scripture that you are making all things new and ask you to open our eyes to see and ear to hear the particular ways each**

of us can work to make this newness real during our lifetime. We ask these things, and those which are to close to our hearts to speak out loud, in confidence that you hear us and answer because you have invited us to be part of your work to renew of creation. Amen

**HYMN: STF 99 All creatures of our God and King** Vs1,2,3,4,7 - St Francis of Assisi H&P 329

<p>All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing, alleluia, alleluia! O burning sun with golden beam, and silver moon with softer gleam : <i>O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia !</i></p> <p>O rushing wind that is so strong, and clouds that sail in heaven along, O praise him, alleluia! O rising morn, in praise rejoice ; and lights of evening, find a voice :</p> <p>O flowing water, pure and clear, make music for your Lord to hear,</p>	<p>sing 'Praise him, alleluia !' O fire, so masterful and bright, giving to all both warmth and light :</p> <p>Dear mother earth, who day by day unfolds rich blessings on our way, O praise him, alleluia ! The flowers and fruits that bloom and grow, let them his glory also show :</p> <p>Let all things their creator bless, and worship him in humbleness ; O praise him, alleluia ! Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One :</p>
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**Benediction:**

Lord of Life, as we go into the wilderness of our lives; open our eyes to see the thirst in the souls of others; empower us to be in their presence inviting them to your spring of living water which bring new life; sustain in us the Life which comes only from you. Amen

**Alternative Songs:**

Let your living water flow over my soul <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uK2oDLMbR3w>  
StF 323 I will sing the wondrous story, H&P 223 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAcpYr9I6Tk>  
StF 748 Glorious things of thee are spoken, H&P 817  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGPM0nDEDfQ>  
StF 541 To the river I am going <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWyQsQxxvC8>  
StF 561 Now I have found the ground wherein, H&P 684  
StF 41 Blessèd be your name <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0e4WsUJvWOA>  
StF 645 Will your Anchor Hold, H&P 689 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTfypuXwrMA>