

Thursday in the Tenth Week after Pentecost: August 13, 2020

Alone at a well in the middle of the day, Jesus meets a woman of Samaria and surprises her. Jesus asks her for water from the well and then offers her “living water” which will quench her thirst unlike the water in the jar that she pulls from the cool depths below. When his disciples return with food purchased in Sychar, they are surprised and become angry with their Teacher.

Read John 4:27-42. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

The disciples are shocked. Their Teacher is talking to a woman of Samaria and a woman who was “married” to five different men and is now living with a sixth man. This woman was not with the other women and their daughters and daughters-in-law who came to the well at the beginning of the day to get water for their families. The disciples do not ask the questions which their indignation communicates but Jesus is very much aware of their sexist and racist objections. Was the woman of Samaria at the well intimidated by the angry men who brought food for their teacher or was she just excited about her encounter with this Teacher who knew so much about her and offered her much more than she could ask or imagine? She wants to return to her friends and share what she has learned.

Jesus knows his followers. His disciples have journeyed with him, listening to him teach and watching him heal the afflicted. His disciples are amazed by what Jesus says and does but they are still not his followers. His disciples offer Jesus food for his body and Jesus responds, **“I have food to eat about which you know nothing!” John 4:32.** The disciples are not just angry but they have not understood the constraints which arise out of their positions of power as men and as those with Judean heritage with a theological focus on the centrality of the Temple in Jerusalem.

As in his conversation with the woman of Samaria at the well, Jesus makes a teaching moment with his disciples. These disciples demonstrate their lack of understanding, wondering if Jesus not only has been given water to drink but food to eat while they had gone into town to get supplies. Jesus speaks of a different kind of nourishment other than meat, bread, vegetables, and fruit. Jesus says, “I am fed by doing the will of the One who sent me and by completing the work the One who sent me gives me to do.” John 4: 34. Jesus understands the power dynamic between himself and the woman of Samaria as well as between himself and his disciples. In John’s gospel, we are constantly challenged to use an ordinary object and appreciate the depth of meaning of a spiritual perspective generated by that ordinary object. In the gospel of John, water from a well is not just water and food is not just food from the farmer’s market and the butcher. The task of harvesting in the fields means more than cutting down the grain stalks and threshing wheat or picking figs from the trees.

The woman of Samaria is not afraid to tell others about the Prophet whom she met at the well. She is filled with energy and her friends trust what she has to say. Word of mouth carries the message which Jesus communicated. Creator cares about all women and men as well as Peoples of both Samaria and Judah. Creator is generous to all. At the well, Jesus offers those without power and whose voices are silenced hope for the future as equals before the One who sent him into the world. It is amazing that the woman of Samaria and her friends leave their work and their town to learn from the Teacher. Those of Samaria identify the Teacher as the One sent by Creator to overturn the socially constructed structures of power in every aspect of life which demean and degrade others.

Read John 4:27-42. What is God saying to us in this passage?

Each and every Human Being is valued by Creator. Peoples who seek Creator and the Great Spirit will receive gifts of living water and spiritual food in order to recognize what Creator has done in the past, is doing now in the present, and will do among generations to come.

From coast to coast to coast, many Indigenous communities lack safe, clean water to drink, to bathe, and to use in a variety of ways that other communities in Canada take for granted. Water and wastewater issues, boil water advisories, and poor sanitation impact people who are medically fragile of all ages and young children. Although the federal government made a commitment to eradicate boil water advisories by March 2021, there are still 61 long-term drinking water advisories in effect as well as some short-term drinking water advisories which have come into effect. Progress has been made in the past 5 years but much more needs to be done in homes as well as in community buildings.

In 2011, the former Chief of Pikangikum First Nation Gord Peters spoke to two engineers in Toronto about the Coroner's Report which identified the community as having the highest suicide rate in the world for youth. When asked what could be done to help, former Chief Gord Peters said that safe, clean water was needed in Pikangikum to give hope to the youth. Pikangikum First Nation can be reached by air or by ice road in the winter, being about 100 km north of Red Lake, Ontario. The engineers connected with another engineer who was the Director of Housing and Infrastructure at the Assembly of First Nations, forming the core of the Pikangikum Working Group. Over the years, a variety of other supports working in the community have been invited to the conference table. The National Indigenous Bishop Mark MacDonald gathered some Anglicans from a variety of parishes to form Pimatisiwin Nipi to raise funds. Since 2011, over \$800,000 has been donated through the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund. The Chief Dean Owen and Council identified the most vulnerable of the 484 households so that 24 homes had insulated tanks for clean drinking water and insulated tanks for wastewater installed in Phases 1 and 2. In the construction of these tanks, 7 youth were trained to make these installations. At this point, the federal government matched the initial \$330,000 raised by the churches so that Phase 3 could be completed, installing water lines from the water treatment plant to five water stations in various places in the community. Additional funds were raised for Phase 4 but this work has been delayed for a number of reasons, including a very short season for the ice road, a drop in water levels during a summer preventing the barge to bring in construction materials across the Barrens River, a forest fire which led to the evacuation of the community twice in the summer, and a change in local leadership. At present, the two engineers are working with Chief Dean Owen to develop a plan to bring clean water to more homes and remove wastewater safely, accessing funds held with PWRDF. Chief Dean Owen explained that the water treatment plant provides water directly for the school, the health centre, and the band offices. Clean water is delivered by truck and wastewater is picked up at homes with cisterns installed. People from their homes bring containers for water to the water treatment plant or now at one of a number of common water taps at various places in the community. People enjoy meeting their friends and extended family members there. When power was supplied by diesel generators, a house had to be torn down before a new one could be built. Now that Wataynikaneyap Power succeeded in bringing power in 2019 from Red Lake to Pikangikum as the first in 22 Indigenous communities, a federal assessment of the use of this power needs to be completed before further plans for housing can be put forward for approval. Chief Dean Owen noted that some

members of Pikangikum First Nation want to live off the power grid and utilize solar power for their homes, including clean water and wastewater systems. Since the number of children and youth are increasing in the community, housing for young parents with young families are needed so the Chief and Council want to explore the option of retrofitting containers to make new homes. The federal and provincial governments made plans to construct a Women's Shelter as well as a Transition Home for those involved with the criminal justice system to keep people in the community rather than removing them. These plans feature some improvements in construction design in dealing with issues of mould and heating in this part of Turtle Island. Chief Dean Owen was asked about utilizing these innovations in building some larger housing units for larger extended families. Chief Dean Owen and Council noted that 600 homes will be needed by 2027 to accommodate the expected growth in population. As in other Indigenous communities, upgrades in fire services will also be needed involving water supplies. Pimatisiwin Nipi has raised money for future work to be done in bringing safe, clean water to the People of Pikangikum First Nation. The two engineers are working with Chief Dean Owen and the Council to get this work done, drawing funding from the PWRDF. Pimatisiwin Nipi will continue to be persistent in ongoing communication and continue to be creative so that youth continue to have hope.

Pimatisiwin Nipi have made connections with a new Non-Governmental Agency WATER FIRST established in Creemore, Ontario to train youth in water management knowledge and skills. Their Indigenous Advisory Council gives direction to WATER FIRST in bringing safe, clean water to Indigenous communities. WATER FIRST engages leadership in Indigenous communities in defining problems with water systems and then develop solutions to make safe, clean water available. Initially, 10 youth were trained and interned with water treatment facilities with 7 Indigenous communities on Manitoulin Island over the course of 15 months. A second batch of 14 youth interns were identified by Bimose Tribal Council in northwestern Ontario to begin an 18-month internship (including 1800 hours on the job experience) for 10 Indigenous communities. These interns began training in February 2020. A third batch of interns is currently being recruited from First Nations on Georgian Bay for 2020-2021. Funds will be needed to sponsor some of these new interns.

Pimatisiwin Nipi continues to work with the two engineers in exploring other remote Indigenous communities in northwestern Ontario with water quality issues. Together, we are seeking to connect with four particular Chiefs and their respective Councils to identify water and wastewater issues and problem solve with this leadership. These Indigenous communities are located within the Anglican Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh with Bishop Lydia Mamakwa as well as in the area served by the Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

Read John 4:27-42. What is God asking us to be and do?

Pray for the Chiefs and Councils or Hereditary Chiefs of the First Nations communities who have short-term or long-term drinking water advisories. Pray for the Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast who seek better housing. Pray for the extended families, clans, friends, and communities who grieve the loss of youth and young adults in their midst.

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