

Come to the Waters

Isaiah 55:1–2; Matthew 7:7–12

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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June 28, 2026/Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

I'm going to try to keep my words briefer this morning. We've already had a full service and there's a soccer game at 1:00 that I know some people might be interested in!

As you've heard by now, we're beginning a five-week series called "God's Shalom for our Common Home" which focuses on creation and will take us to the end of July.

I want to begin with a confession. When these worship resources first crossed my desk several months ago, and I saw the theme, my first reaction was to sigh.

I did this before reading them and *certainly* before realizing that our very own Marie Moyer was involved in creating them! So, it was something of an ignorant and presumptuous sigh.

Why did I sigh?

Well, I've been here for fifteen years, so I doubt I will surprise many when I say, I think sometimes we in the Mennonite Church get the order of operations wrong.

We start with social issues and use a bit of Jesus to justify our preferred political priorities. *Instead* of starting with Jesus and allowing his priorities to shape ours.

And so, I saw the creation theme and I wondered, "Am I going to be expected to do a five part lecture series on environmental ethics?"

But... Then I read the resources. And I was pleasantly surprised. Well done, Marie!

I saw a commitment to ground what we say about creation in the biblical story and in Christian ethics. I saw each Sunday anchored in two texts, one from Isaiah, and one from the gospel of Matthew.

I saw Jesus. Which made me happy.

Because I cannot get up here and do a five-part lecture series on environmental ethics.

For starters, I am unqualified for this. Others can do it better (some in this church!).

And second, I don't think it's what I am called to do. I think that my main role each week is to point people to Jesus. If I don't do this, I think I will have failed in my vocation.

So, over the next five weeks we are indeed going to be focusing on creation and God's vision for the flourishing of all life.

And I'm going to keep pointing us to Jesus. They're connected, obviously, even if we sometimes struggle with the order of operations.

A big thank you to Marie for not only representing our church well on the committee that produced these resources, but for her willingness to help share some of her vision for this series over the next five weeks.

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Today's theme is coming to the water.

It is taken from the opening two verses of Isaiah 55:

Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters.

This is a metaphor for spiritual thirst, certainly, but we should probably pause before rushing to interpret it as nothing but a metaphor.

Isaiah is writing to Jewish exiles in Babylon somewhere around the sixth century BC. These exiles have lived through the trauma of forced displacement, the collapse of their kingdom and all that was once familiar.

It's not hard to imagine an identity crisis. Who are we? Has God abandoned us? Do we still matter?

Additionally, exiles were often materially poor and *literally* hungry and thirsty. To be an exile was to be socially vulnerable, desperate.

The prophets of Israel consistently interpret the causes of Israel's exile to the sin of the people. The failure to live up to God's law, to be what God had called them to be.

So, when we read "Come, all you who are thirsty," we can assume that the word "thirsty" is covering a lot of territory.

It is physical. It is moral. It is spiritual. It is a comprehensive thirst. It's an invitation to a people who are finding that the lives they're living just aren't working.

We are not exiles in the same sense as the people Isaiah wrote to. But when it comes to the moral and spiritual components of thirst, I think we are not so different.

Our technological age has brought us unprecedented material comforts but it has left us spiritually hollowed out.

We have solved so many of the "what's" and the "how's" that previous periods of human history could scarcely have imagined, but we have forgotten the "why."

We have more options—in material goods, in entertainment, in career choices, in lifestyles, in identities—than ever before but many have no sense of our greater purpose.

We have more knowledge at our fingertips (literally) than at any point in human history, but wisdom seems rarer and rarer with each passing day.

Our culture is angry, divided, self-righteous, despairing, trivial, and merciless all at the same time.

We spend money on what is not bread and labour on what does not satisfy, to borrow the language of Isaiah.

To weary, thirsty exiles—then and now—Isaiah offers a vision of a feast, of abundance. Of a thirst slaked, of a hunger satisfied, of gifts of goodness freely given.

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In Matthew, we also encounter the abundance of God through the image of a good father who gives good gifts to his children:

If even we, as earthly parents, long to give good gifts to our children, Jesus says, *how much more* will our heavenly Father offer good gifts?

These verses come in the middle of a larger section where Jesus is talking about not judging hypocritically (take the plank out of your own eye!) and the importance of discernment (don't throw pearls before swine).

So, don't be self-righteous, but do seek to live wisely.

This is where the ask, seek, knock stuff comes in. This is where the, "your father longs to give good gifts to those who ask" comes in.

Perhaps many of us have a thirst, a longing to walk this line well in a culture tearing itself apart over the three issues that I mentioned and many more besides. A culture of polarization and anger and inattention to what matters and addiction and anxiety and despair.

Perhaps some of us have a hunger and a thirst to know how best to avoid self-righteousness and judgementalism while still walking wisely and faithfully, seeking to know how to live in ways that don't exploit God's good creation and which promote the flourishing of all God's creatures.

Jesus, echoing Isaiah says, "Your Father in heaven is a God of abundance who loves to give good gifts."

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That's where I want to end today. With a God who gives good gifts. And with water.

I have another confession to make: I didn't go down to the river to pray this week. My experience with water came on Thursday night.

In the first part of the evening, the sun was out and the weather was warm, so Naomi and I took our one-year-old dog Gracie on a walk. At one point, we passed a house with sprinklers going.

Gracie, of course, went charging into the water. She wrapped her mouth around the nozzle and then lurched backward when the spray surprised her. And then did it over and over again until we moved on.

For her, water was a source of pure delight!

And this is true for so many of us, right? It's easy to focus on the ways in which water sustains life, needs to be managed and conserved and used wisely. This is all good and appropriate.

But each summer, what do many of us do? We go find some water. A river to fish or swim in or just sit beside and listen to. An ocean or lake to paddle or boat in. A pool to take our kids or grandkids to splash around in.

How many of our best memories have water in them?

Later that night, after our walk, the skies opened up with torrential rain for about twenty minutes. I just watched the water fall for a while. How remarkable, I thought, that water just falls from the sky.

Yes, I know the basics about how it all works, about evaporation and condensation and the water cycle I learned about in elementary school. And yes, I know that sometimes too much rain can be terrifying and have catastrophic consequences.

But for whatever reason, on Thursday night it just seemed miraculous that such a thing should happen. That what we need to sustain life and bring delight should just fall from the sky as a gift.

That it should lead to this explosion of life and colour and growth and beauty. None of it is possible without water.

In the simplest possible terms, the story Scripture tells is one of creation, fall, redemption and new creation.

It begins and ends with water. I noticed this in a new way this week.

Genesis 2:4-7:

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, **but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.** Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Before anything else, water.

And then, the last chapter of the bible, Revelation 22:1-2:

Then the angel showed me the **river of the water of life**, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Our story begins with water and it ends with water. With the abundant gift of a life that comes from outside of us, which we do not create, which we cannot sustain on our own.

And the source of that life is the Lamb. The Living Water. The Well that never goes dry. Jesus Christ, whose name we bear and who is the source of the healing of the nations.

For these gifts we say thanks be to God.

Amen.

