

Homily For Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass- Tuesday, March 16, 2021

Ezekiel 47: 1-9,12 "The river flows east from the sanctuary... making stagnant water fresh."

Psalms 46: 1-8 "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God."

John 5: 1-16 "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up."

Making Stagnant Water Fresh

Introduction

In June 2013, we were driving East to Saskatchewan for a family funeral. However, it felt like we were abandoning a sinking ship. 75mm of rain had fallen in just one hour over a significant area in the mountains. That much water and still melting snow gave rise to a 100 year flood event in Calgary and many other communities along the Bow and Elbow Rivers. It was catastrophic for many homes and even left the downtown flooded for days, including the Saddledome and our own Diocesan offices.

As we followed the highway East, from here to Medicine Hat and beyond, every community was bracing for that raging river and what havoc it would wreak. For most people today, a virus is now the river that spreads fear and destruction throughout the land.

Ezekiel

When things are going so well that people forget about God, the prophets have visions about destruction. When things are bleak, as they were at that time of exile, the dreams of the prophets were of great comfort and consolation. Ezekiel had such a vision at the time of Israel's darkest hour, of the restoration of the temple, and God's presence there spreading blessing throughout Israel.

In his vision, the water is coming from the centre of the temple, where God dwells. The temple faces East so the water is flowing Eastward out of the entrance. This orientation of the temple is deliberate because the tradition says that, when the Messiah comes, it will be from the East. Remember that when

Adam and Eve left the garden after they had betrayed God's trust in them, they went East. And when their son, Cain, killed his brother Abel, where did he go? Further East. So it is *from* the east that there is this return to the garden experience of intimacy with the creator.

We might look ahead to the events we will be remembering soon. Where does Jesus enter Jerusalem on a donkey with palms waving? Through the east gate of the city. And, from where is he led in chains back into the city, after his tortured night of prayer in a garden? From the east. However, we will also celebrate the his resurrection. And that life will spread like a river throughout the world, bringing rich fruit and healing to the whole world.

Ezekiel's river vision is a metaphor. There has never been a river in Jerusalem. If anything, it would be a river of the blood of sacrificed animals: bulls and sheep and goats and birds. He is seeing dimly in a dream what we know for certain, that the new life giving river will flow like blood and water from the sanctuary of the saviour's own heart on the cross.

The river does not come from a king's palace or a government building. It doesn't come from a marketplace, a place of business, or an athletic arena. For us, these things have been mostly shut down. But the river of life from the sanctuary is not in the least bit impeded. In fact it flows in even greater abundance.

Ezekiel followed the course of the river as it flowed out to the east one thousand cubits at a time, about half a kilometer. His angelic guide led him through the water. It wasn't very deep at first. There is a picture of increasing progress and depth in our spiritual life. God's people read this and feel a call to go deeper. They shouldn't stop until they are swimming, carried along by God's currents and comfortable in that place.

Eventually, that water flowed right into the Dead Sea, where there is no life, and made it fresh. Wherever things appear lifeless, out of the inner sanctuary will flow a stream of life giving water, even where all seems dead and hopeless.

John

The lame man in the pool by the Sheep Gate has become crippled in spirit after 38 years of waiting for someone to lift him into the pool with the healing power.

Unlike others who hope in healing from Jesus, this man can only complain, even when Jesus *offers* him healing. He has become a victim. He has become psychologically and spiritually paralysed, so much so that even when he is healed, he has no gratitude, without even a desire to know who healed him.

It is the Sabbath day on which he has been healed, the day to worship. But there is no worship or gratitude or joy anywhere in him. And, when he is questioned for carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he rats out the one who healed him, a betrayal of the source of that new life in him.

Call To Action

Jesus warns him to stop sinning or "something worse" will happen to him. But the only thing worse than being physically lame is to be spiritually lame. That's our message today, not to judge that man, but to recognize the one who wants to heal us. Let the river of life wash ourselves clean of our bitterness and victim mentality. Confess our sin and be healed. Learn to swim in that river as it gets deeper and richer in our lives.

Jesus begs us to open our hearts, who wants to flow into the stagnant waters of YOUR life and mine, to make them fresh and life-giving in the circumstances in our lives. It is not the flood of destruction that we imagine is all around us. It is the life giving stream from the sanctuary. Let us not be afraid.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *All who are thirsty, come to the waters, says the Lord.*

Ezekiel: *In the midst of the vision, the angel brought me to the entrance of the temple. The water was flowing toward the east (for the temple faced east). Going eastward, the man measured on thousand cubits, and the water was ankle deep. Again, it was knee deep. Again, it was up to the waist. Again, it was a river that I could not cross ... He said: this water flows toward the east into the Arabah, and when it enters the stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every creature will live. On both banks there will grow fresh fruit for food and leaves for healing because the water for them flows from the sanctuary.*

Psalm: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.*

John: *In Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool called Beth-zatha. One man was there who had been ill for thirty eight years. Jesus said to him: Do you want to be made well? The sick man answered: Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. Jesus said to him: Stand up, take your mat and walk. At once the man was made well. The Jews said to the man: It is not lawful for you to carry your mat on the Sabbath. Who is the man? Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him: See, you have been made well. Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you. The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath.*

Communion Antiphon: *The Lord is my shepherd. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose, near restful waters he leads me.*