

Jon Hauerwas – December 16, 2018 – “Wells” Zephaniah 3:14-20 and Isaiah 12:2-6

Growing up in South Carolina, my family lived in a very nice home in the country situated on 8 acres. The property was serviced by a well, which provided fresh water to our family. It is widely known that people have been using wells for thousands of years. And though our methods for extracting ground water continue to become more sophisticated, the concept remains the same. We dig into the earth in search of that resource that our bodies so desperately need. And then, when we find it, we draw it up to the surface. ¹

The well at my family’s property was powered by electricity. This means that when the power went out, as happens from time to time, we didn’t have any water either. I still remember one of those occasions as a teenager. The power had been out since that morning. I went to school as usual and then drove myself home at the end of the day. When I returned, I was disappointed to learn that the power was still out.

With no lights on in the house, but good weather outside, I spent the afternoon in the yard. There was plenty to do. Eventually, I grew tired, went inside, and

¹ <http://wellowner.org/basics/>

instinctively pumped soap from the dispenser onto my palms before rubbing the foam into my hands. I then reached for the lever on the faucet, expecting for water to flow as it always had. But, there was nothing. Of course, there was nothing. The power was still out. I felt foolish, grabbed a towel to clean myself up, and went hunting for some hand sanitizer for the next time I would be in need.

When things do not go as planned, we are faced with our own limitations, just as I was in my parent's kitchen – searching for running water that was nowhere to be found. Admittedly, my problem was more in keeping with an American inconvenience than a real need. I understand that millions of people around the world have no access to clean, sanitary drinking water on a daily basis. There is a troubling reality that I have never had to face, and which I hope never to experience.

Even so, my larger point remains the same – that despite our perceived autonomy, we are each utterly dependent upon the resources of this world for our daily health, well-being, and sustenance. And, lest we believe that we can live independently from God, as well, Jesus taught us that we “do not live by bread alone, but by every word from the mouth of God.”

Those who wrote the New Testament and those who figure prominently in it were often nourished by the Hebrew Scriptures. From the beginning of the church, Isaiah's reflections stood tall. In fact, "Isaiah is quoted in New Testament writings more than any other book in the Old Testament."² Today's second lesson highlights that emphasis and serves as a "sustained doxology of people who, despite their present condition... know that God controls the narrative."³

In a recent sermon, I relayed a story about a woman in a hospital room, facing the first real crisis of her life. In that moment, with her health on the line, she had chosen to surround herself with the pages of tabloids and was left with no reservoir to dip into. The magazines within her reach offered no meaningful words or phrases, no relevant thoughts or ideas. Just emptiness – the literary equivalent of junk food.

So my question for you today is this: what nourishes and sustains you? And will those resources last? I am reminded of the things that we ask for at Christmastime each year, and I recall a conversation with a Westminster member from last weekend. He told me about his brother who, as a middle school student, did not ask his parents for toys, or electronics, or games one Christmas. Instead, and

² Kimberly L Clayton. *Third Sunday of Advent, Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*. Year C, Volume 1, Ed. Joel B. Green. (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2018), 37.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

I kid you not, he asked his parents to purchase him some Boeing stock. It was a wish that they granted.

Now, I did some research on this. Using my best guess, I'll assume that the purchase was made in the late 1980's. In those days, you could acquire Boeing stock for less than \$10/share. I invite you to contrast that number with the high mark from this year at \$392/share. What a great investment! ⁴ And what a smart young man. He later went onto study at Cornell University and Stanford Law School before ultimately working for the government.

But, friends, what happens when the reverse is true? When stock or housing prices plummet? When jobs are in short supply? When a loved one becomes ill? What happens when a natural disaster sweeps through a town? Or when we are victims of criminal activity?

When we are hurting, what reservoirs will see us through? Once, when speaking with a woman at a well, Jesus said that she could return to that location and have her immediate needs met. But, he also said that she would have to come back time and time again. He then described himself as living water gushing up to eternal

⁴ <https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/charts/BA/boeing/stock-price-history>

life. Friends, it is Advent. We are waiting and watching for the Christ-child. He is that deep and abiding reservoir that our lives so desperately need. Thanks be to God. Amen.