

Duke University Chapel

Student Preacher Sunday, 2/24/08

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Life in High Definition

Monday, December 10, 2007. For most of you this was an ordinary day of no special importance. But for Duke students this day was monumental. This was a day worthy of much celebration. A day my friends and I had been looking forward to all semester. December 10, 2007: Just off Duke's campus, on Erwin road, the grand opening of Chipotle—and the burritos were free. For those of you who are confused, allow me a moment to explain. Chipotle Mexican Grill is a fast food restaurant that makes the most delicious burritos you will ever encounter. My freshman year the closest Chipotle to Duke was in Richmond, Virginia. Amazingly, I have friends who drove the three hours, ate Chipotle, then turned around and came back again. This confirms a point that you know already: college students love food.

It is fitting that food and water are the main concerns in today's Scripture lessons. In the chapter prior to this morning's Exodus text, the people have no food and they complain to Moses, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt? To let us die of hunger? We were better off in slavery.' In today's reading the people are angry again. The air is tense; a riot seems likely to erupt. The people are thirsty and there is no water to drink. The circumstances of today's text are arguably worse, for one can live two months without food, but only three days without water. Again they complain to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

Our instinct says that the people have made an error, but what? Should this people have "gone without" and shown a little self-sacrifice? Is a life of simplicity not good enough? Yet, this makes no sense. These people were asking for food and water—not a Lamborghini with leather interior. *Food* and *water*: the two most basic necessities of this life. We can not condemn these people for asking for the sustenance that their bodies require. No, the people's error is not that they asked for food and water—it's that they *only* asked for food and water.

This becomes clear when we read today's Gospel lesson and recognize that John 4 offers the solution to the situation we see in the Exodus narrative. Jesus' first interaction in this text is an extremely strange conversation with a Samaritan woman about water. As the Samaritan woman approaches the well, Jesus asks her for a drink. Do not take this lightly. This would be like me asking a Carolina student if I could wear their UNC sweatshirt for the afternoon. "What? Why are you—a Duke student—talking to a UNC student? How could you possibly want to wear a Carolina sweatshirt? Don't you know the rivalry between these schools?" Likewise, Jesus must have known before asking for a drink that an incredulous retort was coming from the Samaritan woman. He quickly responds, 'If you knew who I was you would ask me for a drink, and I would give you living water!' Imagine the woman's confusion. First, a Jewish teacher approaches and speaks to her in public. Second, he is suddenly offering her water when just a moment ago that's what he was asking from her! Finally, not only is this man offering her water—he says he has living water!

The scene changes and Jesus begins conversing with his disciples about food. The disciples, who were previously searching for food, have presumably found some, as they tell Jesus to eat. Jesus' response is a strange one, "I have food that you do not know about—my food is to do the will of him who sent me." Clearly, Jesus physically needs both food and water—otherwise he wouldn't have gone to the well and the disciples wouldn't have bothered trying to find him food. Yet with both the woman and with his disciples Jesus seeks to discuss far more than they initially sought. Like the people in Exodus, the woman came to the well simply thirsty, seeking something to drink. Jesus offers her something more. As in Exodus, the hungry disciples are merely trying to find food. Jesus, however, says that there is something greater than food.

The Samaritan woman and the disciples, like the Israelites in Exodus, seek only the bare minimum. It is certainly not wrong that they asked for food and water—it's that they *only* asked for food and water. This is not another story about how followers of God need to practice sacrifice and learn to live without. There is a time and place for that, but this is not it. No, this is a story that ridicules God's people for asking too little. Today's texts preach loud and clear that there is more to life than Chipotle burritos.

Our natural question then becomes, "Okay, what lies beyond food and water"? "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water... Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The Samaritan woman understood the phrase "living water" to mean running water from a spring, as opposed to stale water from a cistern. Living water and cistern water have one fundamental difference: vibrancy. Living water has a richness, a new dimension, that cistern water lacks. It is like the difference between color television versus a black and white set, or standing under the thunderous Niagara Falls versus seeing a picture, or Mike Krzyzewski versus Roy Williams. Jesus is offering life in High Definition.

The movie *October Sky* tells the inspiring story of a young man named Homer Hickam, who lives in a small mining town named Coalwood in West Virginia. Homer's future, like most boys in Coalwood, is hardly uncertain. Without the athletic prowess to get a college scholarship, after high school Homer will most assuredly join his father working in the mines. In October of 1957 the world witnessed the miraculous event of seeing Sputnik launched into orbit. After seeing this wonder, Homer decides that he wants to build rockets. In the movie Homer's immense passion for rocket building is perhaps matched only by his father's disgust for his son's impractical hobby. In the end Homer and his friends go on to success, but what makes this movie so engaging is the contrast between Homer's dreams and the status quo of working in the mines. This energy and vibrancy that Homer embodies is the essence of the living water Jesus offers.

So, how does this living water affect our careers, our relationships, and finally the Church? If there is a topic that undergraduates think about more than food it is trying to find the answer to the question, "What am I going to do with my life?" I've realized since coming to Duke that struggling to discern what to do with one's life is both a blessing and a curse. It would take far less energy to have someone tell us what to do for the rest of our lives, yet this is extremely limiting. Struggling with vocational discernment means that you have been blessed with many gifts and talents, and that you could be successful in a variety of career paths. Given that the Duke community is full of

such talented people, this difficult process is one that most undergraduates have to face. I myself have considered careers ranging from biomedical engineering, to ministry, to strategy consulting. Choosing a career can be a daunting task for anyone, but it is even more complex for the Christian. As Christians, we must not only think about our skills and abilities, but we must add the complex dimension of discerning God's will for our lives. After years of exerting much time and energy on this topic, I think the most important question we must ask ourselves is, "Where does life seem most dynamic for me? What makes me vibrantly alive?" For one person it might be music, for another biological research, for another the pursuit of justice. Wherever it may be, it is in these dynamic and vibrant areas of life that we find not a stale cistern, but the living water of Christ.

Yet, the living water Christ offers is not just about finding the 'right' career. More importantly it says something about the significance of relationships. When I reflect on my career as a student, I realize that I can remember a surprisingly small amount of theories and equations that I've learned in my classes. It's not the hours in the library or the exams that I recall, but rather it's the time we hid a friend's mattress across campus. It's the time I woke up to find a couch barricading me into my room. It's the countless times I have been made fun of for getting lost on the way back from the airport. By having deep and meaningful relationships with other people we teach ourselves what it means to have a quality relationship with Christ. Simultaneously, our relationship with Christ shows us how to become more faithful and invested in our human relationships. It is within this two-way street—learning about God through friendship and learning from God how to be a friend—that we find the vibrancy of Christ's living water.

Yet, this vibrant life is something that is specifically Christian. The Samaritan woman was rather fortunate that she ran into Jesus that day, for it is only Christ that offers this living water. One day after exams were over last semester, I was one of the last people still on campus, and I began to get hungry. I jumped in my car and headed over to—you guessed it—Chipotle. Surprisingly, I did not enjoy Chipotle very much that day, and I realized that it was because on this occasion I was alone. You see, the great part about Chipotle is not the burrito itself, it's being surrounded by people that you know and love. In the church this is what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. On the night before he gave himself for us Jesus called a group of friends together to eat a meal. It was in this setting—Jesus surrounded by his disciples—that mere bread and wine were vibrantly transformed. In the Eucharist we find the fullness of heavenly bread and living water, and indeed our thirst is forever quenched. When the Church gathers to take Holy Communion we experience the transformative nature of Christ. By performing the Eucharist by engaging in acts of mercy, giving to the poor, and caring for those in need, we likewise taste the living water of God. The one who changed water into wine, made lepers clean, and gave life to the dead, is offering to transform our lives as well.

After encountering Christ, the Samaritan woman left her water jar behind and went back to the city. She then utters the three most important words in John's Gospel: "Come and see." Echoing Jesus' earlier invitation to his disciples, the Samaritan woman now invites others to enter Jesus' story. Such vibrancy can not be contained; such energy must be allowed to expand. Thus it is for us today: Jesus offers living water so that we might be transformed into a new and vibrant creation. As the Church, our calling, and

desire, is to help others see the vibrant new life that is possible in Christ. Indeed, to be a faithful Church, is to be a vibrant Church.

Sunday, February 24, 2008. For most people this is just another ordinary day of no special importance. But for us at Duke Chapel it is monumental. Today our eyes have been opened to the vibrancy of Christ Jesus. As Christians we must no longer be satisfied with the bare minimum of stale bread and old water. Demand more from life. Expect more from God. Amen.