

**Noe Valley Ministry  
1021 Sanchez Street  
San Francisco, CA 94114**

**“Living Water — An Amazing Substance”  
A summer sharing by Carol De Francis  
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“Living Water”—what a mysterious and intriguing idea! What does this image mean? What is it? If we can see what Jesus was talking about, then perhaps that insight will open to a deeper understanding of him and God and life. This delicious possibility peaks curiosity and seems worthy of investigation, so let’s dive into the mystery of “living water.”

Let’s begin by looking at ordinary water, the kind that the Samaritan woman was drawing from Jacob’s well. It covers a great portion of the earth’s surface, and comprises over 70% of the substance of the human body. In its pure state, it is colorless, odorless, tasteless and, aside from its structure at the molecular level, has no shape. You can cup it in your hands, but if you try to grasp it tightly, it eludes capture by escaping through your fingers.

And then, what about water in its symbolic sense? In baptism, it is used to symbolize a cleansing of the soul and a new beginning. A river is a common image used to describe, metaphorically, the movement of life. Like a river, life travels on, and we are unable to step out of its relentless flow in order to rest and rebalance ourselves. It carries us along, ever more swiftly with each passing year, and sometimes threatens to overwhelm us with its speed, force and challenges. We bob like corks in this constant motion of living, and are driven forward, like it or not.

So, water is, literally and figuratively, the stuff of life. The Bible is saturated with water, from the creation of the world and the days of Noah and the flood, through the prophecy of the River of the Water of Life, in the last chapter of John’s Revelation.

Now, let me tell you about some of my experience with “living water.” For many, many years, I thought I could figure out life and figure out myself. I wanted to understand, and I wanted to be right, and I wanted to be sure. I felt confident that once I had firmly grasped the meaning of life and my role in it, I would be able to step forward in secure knowledge and smug satisfaction that I had answered the

eternal existential questions: “Who and I?” and “What am I doing here?” But I never felt sure enough to move forward, and I didn’t know how to gain the certainty which I sought. I prayed about this situation, and God replied to me, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” (1) “Okay”, I challenged, “What is your way?” God said, simply, “Go with the flow.” (This statement is not in the Bible; nonetheless it was/is God’s answer to me.)

I thought about God’s response in light of the anxiety and frustration which I sometimes feel about not being able to get a sure handle on, or rest from life. The title of an old Broadway musical, “Stop the World-I Want to Get Off”, well-expresses these feelings.

I’ve tried to slow down, to live simply, to dig in my heels and put the brakes on life; the image of a dam comes to mind. A tremendous amount of energy has backed up behind my stance. I have willfully turned away from and neglected facing real issues and problems that have come my way because I hoped to conquer them using mind-over-matter techniques of repression, denial, dissociation and procrastination. But anxiety and depression, helplessness and hopelessness leak through the wall of resistance that I’ve erected to hold back life. Life cannot be dammed without serious practical and emotional consequences. (To my mind, which enjoys word play, these effects could illustrate the meaning of “damnation”.)

God said to me, “Go with the flow.” Perhaps one of the mysteries of life is that when you do move with it, taking it as it comes, with whatever presents itself, and without resistance, you are then flowing at the same speed as life. You and life become one, and in that unity you can discover a sense of stillness and peace. I am learning that you can’t grab onto life, or pin it down with concepts, or hold it in certainty. Just as ordinary water is colorless, odorless, tasteless and formless, life is beyond definition and understanding. I am learning to move in its mystery and live into its truth.

Jesus went with the flow. He lived a most unobstructed, unresistant life. His ministry carried him here and there, to this town and that. He did not appear to ponder how he would handle future situations, or what he would say to people. He did not reflect on or regret his past. He was unencumbered by material wealth, property of family obligations. His energy and attention were undivided; he was wholly present – a Holy Presence.

What did Jesus mean when he told the Samaritan woman about the internal well of living water that would spring forth into eternal life? I believe that he was talking about being, the verb “to be”; in other words –“I am”. Eternal life does not travel through the wide gate or along the broad path (2) of “I was” or “I will be”; not “I could be,” or “I would be”, or “I should be.” It moves through the narrow gate and path of “I am.” This is how Jesus lived and this is who Jesus is. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”(3) In faith and in unity with God, he walked and walks, without reflection or projection, in the here and now, in the present.

The living water of being is ancient: “Before Abraham was, I am,” (4) and it is ever-new, as well: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.”(5) It is not far away, but very close: “The time is fulfilled, and the realm of God is at hand.”(6) It is innocent and pure, like the Christ Child in the manger, and fresh and free, like the little children who wanted to come to Jesus.(7) It can revitalize thirsty souls suffering from inertia, stagnation, hopelessness and depression: “I am the resurrection.” (8)

And what about God and “living water”? We commonly think of God as the Source of our being, like the inner well of eternal life of which Jesus spoke. In the water of Baptism, we are symbolically washed clean of our impurity or adulteration, in order to “live, and move, and have our being” in God. (9) I certainly believe these understandings of God. But often, I think we mistakenly imagine God as a force separate from ourselves. Indeed, the entire Bible depicts God as other to the people. We think of God as a Being. My experience and inquiry has led me to understand God as being. God said to Moses, “I am that ‘I am’.” (10) (emphasis, mine) If we stood in Moses’ shoes, and felt compelled over other inner and outer voices of dissuasion to take command such as he did, the powerful urge within might be experienced as “I am the one to lead my people!” That could be the “I am” that God is! God is being – whole, Holy Being. When we heed the commandment, “You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind,”(11) we can drink of the Living Water of Being, of Life, that is the Triune God, ever-bubbling forth—fresh and clean, new and free—in us.

Let me conclude with a reading from the book of Revelation. John writes: “A great voice out of heaven said to me, ‘It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty, I will freely give from the spring of the water of life.’ And I was shown a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal,

flowing forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ‘Let those who are thirsty, come. And let anyone who desires it take, as a gift, the water of life.’” (12)

May you draw this water, quench your thirst, and go with the flow.

Amen.

### References

- 1) Isaiah 55: 8
- 2) Matthew 7: 13-14
- 3) John 14: 6
- 4) John 8: 58
- 5) Isaiah 9: 6
- 6) Mark 1: 15
- 7) Mark 10: 14
- 8) John 11: 25
- 9) Acts 17: 28
- 10) Exodus 3: 14
- 11) Luke 10: 27
- 12) Revelation 21: 6: 22: 1 and 17

### Scripture Readings

Hebrew – Jeremiah 17: 7-8

Gospel – John 4: 5-14