

ST BART'S

A Meditation by

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“I Am Thirsty”

*Meditation preached at the Three Hour Service 12 noon to 3 o'clock, April 18, 2014
Good Friday, Based on John 19:25b-28*

Jesus, dying on the cross, says, “I am thirsty.” “I’m thirsty.” Just the night before, Jesus was sharing food and wine with his disciples. He was washing their feet with cool, clean water. But now, now he is thirsty. This statement could not be more raw, more vulnerable, or more human. People can’t live without water. It’s one of the basic elements that sustain life—as important as air. We all know what it’s like to feel thirsty, to feel dry, parched, longing for some cool liquid to restore us. The feeling of being really, really thirsty engenders a desperate longing to find something to slake our thirst. And the thing about thirst is that it can’t be satisfied from within. When you’re thirsty, you need a drink. You need something outside yourself.

Indulge me for a moment if I share a television commercial I really like. Maybe you’ve seen it—it shows two men in suits, wandering in the desert, desperate for water. As they stumble along, a Fiat sedan drives by. In the car are several young women, laughing and waving. One man says to the other, “I just hate these mirages.” A while later, the men are more exhausted and parched than ever, and another Fiat sedan comes by, this time occupied by the pop icon Sean “P. Diddy” Combs. P. Diddy leans out of the car and offers the men a bottle of water. One of the men is excited and wants to take the water, but the other one slaps him across the head: “I told you, don’t pay attention to those mirages.” P. Diddy shrugs and drives on. Finally, the two men, nearly collapsed with thirst, see a lush oasis where P. Diddy and his friends are having a huge party. There’s music, food, and lots and lots of water. The hopeful man runs toward the party while his friend yells after him: “No! Your mind is playing tricks on you! It’s all fake! It’s just a mirage.” “How do you know that?” the first man asks. “Those Fiats have four doors! Everyone knows that Fiat only makes small cars!” “Guess you’re right,” the first man says. And they stumble off into the desert, without food, without water, and without a cool four-door ride.

It’s a funny commercial. Like a lot of comedy, it plays on suffering and pain in order to make us laugh.

I wonder, though, how unreal this commercial really is. There’s a relatable metaphor here that captures the ways in which we can wander through life, thirsting, sometimes frantically, for something that will satisfy the longings within us. We want, we *need*, but what? What will satisfy? Sometimes it’s right there in front of us, but we don’t recognize it.

The two guys in the commercial, desperate to get out of the desert, desperate for a drink of water, are offered a ride and a cool drink, but they turn it down. It’s just too good to be true. When they hit the jackpot—a full-blown oasis with wine, women, and song, they still turn away. Their salvation is right in front of them and they reject it. Their restoration and refreshment is there for the taking, offered by a famous star no less, and they cannot accept it. Why? Because it doesn’t look like what they expected.

As a therapist, I see thirsty people every day. They thirst for love. They long for acknowledgment. They crave connection. And so often they seek to satisfy their thirst in ways that don’t gratify—alcohol, drugs, sex, cars, possessions, power. They look everywhere but don’t see that what they really need and want is something much simpler. To be connected, simply and genuinely, in relationship. This won’t get them glory or power. It will require them to face their pain, and to be vulnerable. This is simple, but it’s not easy. So they keep looking everywhere else, until they are ready to have just enough faith that such a simple, human thing as genuine relationship might just be their salvation, even if it’s not what they expected.

I think it’s easy even for us people of faith to turn away from what really satisfies, what really saves us, because it doesn’t look like we expect it to. Like those guys in the commercial. Maybe we don’t expect P. Diddy, but maybe we do expect something extraordinary, transcendent, something that is very much outside our human experience: God

coming down on a cloud with angels and trumpets; God coming down and ending all the wars, giving drinks to all the thirsty people, ending poverty and sickness and emotional suffering; God “fixing” us, and our broken relationships, and our crazy relatives. We think our ultimate satisfaction and restoration ought to look extraordinary.

Salvation shouldn't look like this—this poor, obscure nobody, this man deserted by his friends and dying on a cross. He has no money, no prestige, no power. He cannot even satisfy his own thirst. This is not the salvation we expect. It is too humble, too messy, too human. Yes, another day will come that looks triumphant and glorious. But it is not today.

The Jesus we see today is a reminder that faith and salvation are always and everywhere about real life. That just maybe the God we are looking for can be found not in the sky, not in some “heaven light years away” as one of my favorite hymns says. But here. Now. In the face of the person next to us and in the face of every person who endures pain, suffering, and loss. In other words, in the face of every person. Even our own.

Come out of the desert. Look around you. Drink it in.

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