



# ST BART'S

A MEDITATION by:

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Youth and Family Ministries

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## “I Am Thirsty”

*A meditation preached on March 29, 2013*

*Good Friday: The Three Hour Service from 12 noon to 3 o'clock*

*Based on John 19:25b-28*

Of the seven last words of Jesus, these are the only ones I am certain he actually uttered on the cross. "I am thirsty."

The writer of John's gospel would have us believe that with these words, "I am thirsty," Jesus is fulfilling scripture, a reference to Psalm 69, but I am willing to take Jesus literally here.

Good Lord. He must have been thirsty. Crucifixion is a terrible way to die.

Of the seven last words of Jesus, these are the only ones I am certain we actually utter, on ordinary days, and often. "I am thirsty."

While I often struggle with the divinity of Christ, I never question his humanity. My heart breaks anew hearing these words. "I am thirsty."

Water is the very essence of life, the most common substance on earth. It covers 80% of the earth's surface and makes up more than half of our bodies. Humans can live for a month without food, but for less than a week without water. It may be that life itself began in water. All the water there ever will be already exists. It has been here since our planet was created.

Water stories and imagery fill the Hebrew scriptures, beginning with the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters in Creation. Over and over again, we are shown that water is not only for cleansing, it is a symbol of renewal and refreshment for God's people, especially in the Psalms and the books of the prophets. It's natural that water would matter to a desert-dwelling people, and yet in the Gospel of John water comes to mean even more. From Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River to his turning water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana to his stilling the storm-tossed waves, water for the writer of John is never about the obvious or the expected. Jesus tells the woman at the well that those who drink of the water he offers will never be thirsty again. He cures a man who cannot enter the pool of Bethsaida, becoming himself the healing water.

Water is a powerful symbol of the divinity of Christ, and today I do not want metaphor. Today of all days I want what is real. This man I love is dying in the worst possible way, and I do not want John's gospel to glorify it. I find no glory in suffering. Less than twenty-four hours before, Jesus poured water over the feet of each of his disciples. Some of it splashed on the floor, dampened his robe. Now his throat is parched; he is dying of thirst.

Last Friday was a day not as well known as today. People did not come to church to observe it. Last Friday was World Water Day, and in the time it takes me to give this meditation, 60 children will die as a consequence of not having clean water. Eight thousand children die each day from unsafe water. It is the leading cause of death in childhood worldwide—more than war, malaria, AIDS and traffic accidents combined. This utterly preventable and shameful tragedy is as real as it gets.

And yet . . . all the water that ever will be already exists: the water that rocked the ark, the water that parted before Moses, the water that gushed from the rock, the water that flowed from Jesus' side is the very same water that we use for bathing and laundry and washing up the dishes and filling the kiddie pool and watering the basil on the window sill. The water that puts out the campfire and the house fire, the water that pours from the Brooklyn tap and springs from the Roman fountain, the water from the well in Kenya and the mud puddle in Cambodia and the water in the font at our baptism is the water that has been here since the beginning of time. All water is holy water.

Watch the water as the priest pours it drop by drop into the chalice of wine—our humanity mingled with Christ's divinity. The two cannot be separated.

We do this all the time—I do this all the time—I make divisions between the sacred and the profane, the holy and the ordinary, the rational and the miraculous, Jesus the man who thirsts from the cross and Jesus the Christ who walks on water. They are one. We are each of us made in the image of God, we carry the divine spark of our maker, we are holy people, all of us.

Pastor and author Rob Bell's newest book, *What We Talk About When We Talk About God*, takes on these false dichotomies in a powerful way. Bell writes, "This is why the Jesus story is so massive, progressive, and forward-looking in human history. Jesus comes among us as God in a body, the divine and the human existing in the same place, in his death bringing an end to the idea that God is confined to a temple because the whole world is a temple, the whole earth is holy, holy, holy, as the prophet Isaiah said. Or, as one of the first Christians put it, we are the temple. There's a new place where God dwells, and it's us." (p. 181-82)

We recognize this in our baptisms as we make the promise: "to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves." We heard these words last night, before we removed our smelly socks and awkwardly knelt to wash each other's feet: "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." And in Matthew's gospel, Jesus brings it back to a simple act of kindness: "For I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."

From the cross Jesus speaks to us, and we understand this much: we are human and we suffer. Remember, too, that we are holy and we serve. God dwelling in us gives us the strength and the courage. In the words of the prophet Amos, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." *Amen.*

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