

## “Living Water”

2 Samuel 23:13-17

Titus 3:1b-7

Saul was Israel’s first king. He had many military victories, but he was impatient and lost God’s favor. So, David was anointed to be the next king. He was brought into the court to play the lyre to soothe Saul’s wild and violent moods. David defeated Goliath and became fast friends with Saul’s son. Seeing that David was amassing more and more victories, that the people loved him more and more, Saul became paranoid and began trying to kill David. Eventually, David needed to flee. He brought his family with him and did what he could to keep them safe. Then he started gathering his own followers – people who were suffering and struggling, people who had debts and were unhappy. At this point, he had about 400 men and they were headquartered at a cave in Adullam, about 13 miles from Bethlehem.<sup>i</sup>

But this band of underdogs wasn’t there to act as David’s bodyguards. They worked together to fight against their nation’s enemy – the Philistines. The Philistines had more resources, more advanced technology, better equipped soldiers. In battle, victory against them was never assured, which is why David’s success is and was so remarkable. Back to the scripture at hand, though, David joins his men at their stronghold and it is pretty close by Bethlehem, David’s hometown. He’s been in danger, on the run, under pressure for so long, he just lets slip, “O that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem!” And, to be clear, it’s not that there was no water to drink where they are. They would have dug a cistern to collect rainwater so they could hold their position. This would have been good enough to live on, but cisterns were usually coated in limestone or plaster so that they wouldn’t lose so much water. If you had to rely on them for water, it would have turned brackish – fast. So, David isn’t dying of thirst – he’s remembering this wonderful well that he grew up with. Maybe it was fed by a

natural spring or maybe it was just big enough and replenished often enough that the water tasted cool and clear. Either way, he's getting caught up in sentiment or nostalgia.<sup>ii</sup>

Three of his warriors hear his wishful thinking and they decide to honor his request. Between the cave and the well there was a company of Philistines – not in active combat, but encamped and biding their time. These three warriors risked their lives to sneak through enemy lines just to give their commander the water he dreamed of.

David saw their gift and knew what it meant. He knew what they risked for him – how he did not need that water, how they knew he did not need that water. And yet...they went anyway. What would he have done if they had lost their lives for his musing? Humbled by their bravery, their commitment, their generosity, David poured the water onto the ground. This might sound strange to us. After all that they had risked, the least he could do is drink and enjoy the water, right? But David recognized that such devotion belongs to God alone. He was in a position to ask them to risk their lives for the survival of their nation. Indeed, it would not be too long before troops died in battle under his command. Once more his eyes were opened – every sacrifice must be truly honored.

As we worship and serve God, we seek to learn more about the Holy Trinity. Awestruck, sometimes all we can say is God is God is God. It might be easier for us to describe the Father in one way, the Son in another, the Spirit in yet another; or we might be tempted to say that the Creator judges us and Jesus loves us and the Spirit comforts us. But, when we do that, we undo the Trinity. We believe that all three persons are equally God, one God, sharing the same essence. All of God is loving and comforting, judging and challenging and saving. On top of that, we were made in God's image. We are only what we are because it is part of God. Because God is love, we can be loving. Because God is creator, we can be inspired and creative. Because

God is All-Powerful, we, too, have power. And it can be so hard for us to see that we, individually, have power – that what we do makes a difference and changes the world.

A hundred years ago, a tragedy happened in Tulsa. And it was so horrifying, it got so big and out of control, that we're left wondering what exactly happened and how it got that far. A Black man and a white woman were in an elevator – teenagers. A clerk thought they heard her screaming and the man ran away. The clerk called the police to report a crime. When the police investigated, they determined that there had not been an assault. The woman did not want to press charges. The police picked up the man and held him for questioning. That afternoon, a sensationalist newspaper got wind of the story and decided it was an assault. They published a separate editorial warning that the man might be lynched that night. Later, the police chief was quoted as saying, “if the facts in the story as told the police had only been printed, I do not think there would have been any riot whatsoever.”<sup>iii</sup>

Then the lines were drawn. A lot of white folks, out to ensure mob justice against the man, armed themselves and pressed in on the courthouse. A lot of Black folks, scared of the violence, armed themselves and tried to get an idea of what was going on so that they could protect themselves. Those white folks saw those Black folks with guns and they got more scared and they got more guns, more support for their mob. The fear and misinformation made everything bigger and bigger until it blew up.<sup>iv</sup>

Violence broke out, firing back and forth, mobs tore through Greenwood with oily rags lit on fire. Firefighters tried to go put the fires out and were stopped at gunpoint by white mobs. Stores were looted, houses and churches and hospitals burned to the ground, fiery turpentine balls rained from the sky. Rioters knocked on the doors of other white families who had hired

Black folk in their homes and demanded that they turn their employees over to the mob. If they refused, the mob attacked and vandalized their homes.<sup>v</sup>

Eventually, the national guard quelled the violence. Casualty reports varied widely, but we know that more than 800 people had to go to hospitals, that around 10,000 Black people lost their homes, and that the property damage was massive. At the time, it amounted to more than 2 million dollars, which would equal about \$32 million today.<sup>vi</sup>

Then, over the years, it became a secret. It wasn't taught, little or nothing was given to those who had lost so much, and things just moved forward. It is hard to uncover history like this. It's hard to learn about things that we wish had never happened – that we can't imagine that anyone would or could even do to another human being. Yet, we hear from the letter to Titus that the way forward is not to pretend the past didn't happen. Paul says we know we used to be foolish, disobedient, hateful – full of every kind of sin. But when we really see Jesus, when we really follow the leading of the Spirit, when we receive the grace that has been freely given to us – we must be changed. We have received mercy; God has given us that living water that leads us to the miracle of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit. We are following Jesus on a path of grace so we do not need to deny the sins of the past, the sins of others or our own sins today. Grace covers us, which gives us the freedom to confess honestly and move forward with hope.

David forgot his power and out of love his soldiers risked their lives for him. His soldiers remembered their power and did everything they could to support his weary heart. They saw his humanity, even his weakness, and honored him for it. A hundred years ago, those who wrote for that newspaper, those who gathered a lynch mob – they forgot their power. They used their life and strength and time to violently seize and destroy what they wanted to out of fear and anger. I'm sure that not one of them woke up that morning intending to level 35 square blocks of North

Tulsa,<sup>vii</sup> but they took the possibility of that day with thousands of smaller choices, they gave themselves over to the surge of the mob.

So, we remember David's yearning for the cool, clear water and that God sees infinite worth in every life. We remember the waters of Baptism that flow freely, that lift our bodies even as they fill our souls. We see that every day, every moment of our lives is a holy and precious gift from God and that we can make it a holy and precious gift to God. Each one of us has some power and we have a choice about what to do with it. So, today, as you leave the sanctuary, you will find a bottle of water on the table to remind you of the living water that infuses every moment of your life. If your heart thirsts to be refreshed, please enjoy it and be renewed. If you pass a neighbor mowing the lawn or working in the yard, offer it to them as a gift of love and friendship. If you see someone begging on your drive home, let this water be a blessing to them. If thousands of small bad choices can create a horror, then thousands of small good choices can make a miracle.

We listen to the lessons of the past so that we may mourn with those who mourn, make right what we can, and follow the light of the new day. Never again starts with each and every heart. Let us honor the sacrifices of all those who fight for freedom and justice and equality for all. Let us honor the dreams of our ancestors by living in love, as Jesus taught us to do. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://bibleatlas.org/adullam.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Cartledge, Tony W. *1 & 2 Samuel*. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2001), 684-685.

<sup>iii</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulsa\\_race\\_massacre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulsa_race_massacre)

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