

Responding to the Vision

Acts 16:9-15

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

John 5:1-9

Psalms 67

If you have always lived in Virginia, then you may not realize just how verdant it is here.

Having grown up in the desert of Arizona and then spending my adult life in the high desert of Colorado, I have a deep appreciation for the value and impact of water. The landscapes of my life have been gray and brown, which makes the green of this world that much more spectacular. Perhaps it is because of the parched lands of my life, that I have always been drawn to the water. I find the endless creeks, rivers, and ponds in this area a constant source of delight.

Have any of you ever seen or tasted water from an actual spring in the ground? I will never forget my first encounter with one. In the Rocky Mountains, it can be pretty barren towards the end of summer. You can trace creeks from a distance because flowers and bushes follow them across otherwise dry landscapes. A group of us were on a multiple day backcountry trip, looking for a campsite and came to one of these little creeks. After tying up the horses, one of our group headed out to investigate the area when she started hollering for us to join her. She had found the source of the stream. We peered down and watched the water bubbling up, straight out of the ground, and then cascading out into the creek that wound through the meadow. The water soaked into the ground along the banks, creating a floral dreamscape with butterflies and bees enjoying the nourishment. And, as we watched the water emerging directly from its underground chambers, we decided nature had done enough filtering. We plunged our water bottles straight in and drank deeply from cold crystal waters. I assure you; it tasted better than any commercial you've ever seen for bottled water. Pure heaven. Whenever I read Biblical imagery of the springs of the waters of life, this is what comes to mind.

This morning, we celebrate two holidays, Memorial Day and Rogation Day. Memorial Day is the remembrance of those who gave their lives in war. It looks back with gratefulness, celebrating the courage and selfless sacrifices of those who made it possible for us to live in freedom. Rogation Day is dedicated to prayer and the blessing of the land, asking for provision through fruitful labor. It looks ahead with anticipation, recognizing our dependance on God's mercy for the earth's flourishing **and** joins our intentions to care for the land with our requests for God's favor. Two holidays. One that balances the grief of loss with the gratefulness for the present. The other blessing the present and looking ahead in hope.

Today our texts tell of two visions. Luke recounts his experience of Paul's midnight vision where a man in a country 150 miles away asked him to come "and help us". And John tells of his vision of a heavenly city, a remade earth, with the Lord as the light, and the river of life flowing out from it. Two visions. One of a people living in a broken world, pleading for help. The other of a perfected world, replete with everything necessary for enduring abundance.

When Paul had this vision, a man spoke begging him to come. Paul's response was immediate. He wasted no time before gathering his traveling companions and braving the seas. But once they arrived, the man from the vision did not appear. After several days, on the Sabbath, instead they found a woman, Lydia. She was not the man Paul expected, but she was eager to respond to the message of the good news, she and her household were baptized, and then she used her home as a place of refuge and provision for Paul and his band of missionaries. Often in Scripture, we see the work of God in human hearts described through planting and harvesting imagery. On Rogation Day, Paul's hasty response to God's leading mirrors our anticipation of God's movement and our

intentional choices to follow. Likewise, Lydia's eager responsiveness to the gospel reflects agricultural grounds blessed by God and rich for harvesting.

Then, in Revelation we see the fruition of the prophetic hope outlined in our Psalm. In this heavenly city, God's ways are made known upon the Earth, all the peoples praise God, all the nations joyfully herald the perfection of God's leadership, the earth itself is fruitful, and the city relishes the blessing of God's presence. This is the remade Eden, the perfection God initially intended restored. There is no barrier between God and the people, they see the light of God's face with perfect clarity and that light illumines the whole land. All the people respond in service to God so there are no walls barring entrance, no war, no clamoring for supremacy, only perfect peace and abundance where everyone reigns together in equity. On Memorial Day, when we grieve the lives that have been lost through human division and warfare, Revelation offers a picture of the peace and healing to which all history is moving—no more war, no more curse, only restoration and abundant life for all.

John's story of the pool at Beth-zatha reminds us that Jesus is the source of the water of life. Walking through an as yet unrestored Jerusalem, stopping by a magical pool that was said to cure disease, Jesus meets a man who had been incapacitated for 38 years from illness. Jesus didn't wait for those magical waters to stir to provide this man healing. Jesus was the very source of healing. He saw the man, witnessed his suffering, and he himself, as the springs of the very water of life, became the man's salvation. While Revelation's heavenly vision highlights the crystal perfection of Jesus' life-giving, thirst-quenching, healing waters found in that future city, Jesus made that future into a reality by his presence.

Many of us may be feeling like that man. Many of us are spiritually or emotionally “lying by the pool”—wounded, weary, and waiting. Memorial Day reminds us of wounds, our own, the world’s, those suffering the impacts of war and those fearful of wars to come. Jesus appears and asks: “Do you want to be made well?” Rogation Day invites us to ask for blessing, to imagine a different future, one of abundance, and to join God in making it possible by planting seeds, pulling up weeds, and letting the water of life do its work of refreshing parched ground.

Each of today’s stories demonstrate human participation in the activity of God. Jesus freely offers us healing and restoration. Our role is accepting it. Immediately following this man’s healing, Jesus invited him to get up and live a healed life. For this man, his first act of obedience of living into his restoration, meant opposing those in power over him. He had to carry his matt on the Sabbath and walk past them into a life governed, not by their will, but by the priorities of heaven. His healing meant being filled with and living from the water of life, the power of the presence of Jesus. For us, moving from those waters toward a renewed life and earth also means allowing our priorities to be rearranged by our faith. Our earth is soaked in blood from the violence of those seeking power over one another. Jesus invites us to be conduits of the waters of life, healing and effectual waters.

If we are to celebrate Memorial Day with integrity, if we are to pray Rogation Day prayers honestly, we must join our hearts and hands with Jesus **in** the work of restoration.

Personal, national, agricultural, and emotional healing begins when we turn to Christ. We are not alone in our waiting; His presence meets us in it. He sees us. And his living water is the source of all healing.

So, where is the river running in our lives today? Are we allowing it to run through us, or still waiting by its edge? This Rogation and Memorial weekend, may we be a people willing

to let our faith in these visions of restoration move us to participate in the work of restoration, for ourselves and on behalf of others.