

Following the Spirit Connie McConnell

Jesus cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:37b-38

When I am really thirsty I reach for a cool, refreshing glass of water. It has to be water...not coffee or tea, not coke or lemonade...it has to be water. Water is plain and simple...it doesn't have any sugar or caffeine or flavor. It is pure refreshment. Water just happens to be your body's most important nutrient, is involved in every bodily function, and makes up 70-75% of your total body weight.

Water is a precious commodity that we Americans take for granted. Yet in impoverished countries water, especially safe drinking water, is hard to come by. "Disaster relief experts have noted that the United States spends about \$40 million every year for water projects in Asia and Africa, but Americans spend about \$10 million on bottled water domestically." (*Ending Hunger Now*, pg 5) We have the power to affect a change. How much do you think we could give toward the effort of providing clean water to people in need if every time we twist the cap off of a bottle of water we put the equivalent cost of it into a piggy bank? Would it be worth the effort? Don't drink clean water for a day and the value will be crystal clear. I challenge you this Lenten season to see how much money you can contribute to making clean water available to those desperately in need of it. I'll check in with you after Easter.

But there's another kind of water referenced in the text above, living water. What is living water? In Hebrew, the term means spring water...water that comes from a source that is moving and thus full of oxygen as opposed to a puddle of water that is stagnant. In all their cleansing rituals they had to use living water. In the New Testament Jesus proclaims that he is the source of living water...that in him we are satisfied and made clean. "In the book of John, water is a metaphor for the Spirit. It symbolizes the spiritual renewal promised in the OT prophets and offered in Christ. This living water is flowing within Christ who becomes a renewing spring from whom we are invited to drink." (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pg 870) It begs the question, what are you thirsty for? Is it that bottled water or is it something bigger and better than that? Lent is the season to ponder such things, to consider who refreshes you rather than what.

"Water is a precious resource from God. The living water that Jesus offers is even more precious. We can become spiritually dehydrated when we don't hear and read the Word given to us. But we have a responsibility once we receive the water of salvation to let that living water flow from our hearts to bring the good news to others." (*A Forty Day Walk of Faith*, pg 4)

Blessings on your Lenten journey.

"Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief." Mark 9:24

It was the last Friday of the month. That meant a long day at school for us who were on the staff of the Western High School paper, the Round Up. After classes we would walk over to Mr. Edelman's apartment. He was our staff sponsor. After proof reading our copy, we'd go to the nearby White Castle and get hamburger carry outs for our supper as we "put the paper to bed."

Our conversation turned to the recent discovery of dinosaur bones in Utah. Mr. E turned to me and said, "You are an intelligent girl. Someday you will realize it's not possible to believe in Creation. I responded, "Creation is so incredible, it's impossible not to believe in it."

The next day I talked with my grandfather, a retired minister, about this discussion. He said, "The rock foundation of your faith is God's love for you. Faith is a gift that was given to you at baptism." (Easter Sunday 1925.)

God's love is shown in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we wrestle with pain and suffering and ask why God allows it, perhaps the better question should be -- why do we as beloved children of God allow it?

Sometimes when we are reciting the Creed or the Lord's Prayer I can feel that I am part of a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before me. One of these is my great, great grandmother who came to America when the rulers in Germany decreed that all the Protestant churches must unite. She valued her Lutheran heritage so much that she (a widow) immigrated to America with her seven children, leaving the security of family and friends.

My faith foundation is based on the love that God has shown for me in sending his son to be with me. As Martin Luther wrote in his explanation of the third article of the creed (see your new red hymnal) "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel and enlightened me with His gifts."

There is a road to be traveled- a road of happiness and sorrow, of joy and meekness; joy and sorrow; of complete fulfillment for becoming all God meant us to be as Followers of the Way.

"...Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Job 1:21

Entering into any sort of political, social, environmental or spiritual debate with my middle son, Kyle, is not for the faint of heart! It is not Debate 101. He is passionate about what he believes and will not hesitate to make his view—sometimes vehemently—known! It can certainly be mentally and emotionally challenging and there are even times when it is physically exhausting! But always, he causes me to think about or rethink what I thought I believed or knew. Such was the case last night. We were discussing global warming which led to overall attitudes of folks toward caring for the environment which led to what motivates people which led to him predicting that we were perhaps headed for a semi-catastrophic time of realignment (not unlike, I suppose, the Middle Ages) when we would all lose the way of life we have and have to learn all over again what is most important. He seemed to think that this might not be such a bad thing. Then he asked me a question that I could not answer. He pointed around me at my nice home and the great food that was cooking on the stove and he said, "You'd be okay with losing most of this, wouldn't you? I mean, I know you're attached to some things for sentimental reasons but could you give this up?"

I didn't like the question and I didn't like how I felt about the answer that I knew to be true. Even though I profess to be a Christian and to trust in God, questions like that really put that profession to the test! The truth is I like my lifestyle. Not that there aren't always things that I can readily give away to charity or the dump but I like my very nice home with the big gourmet kitchen. I like our artwork and antique furniture. I like eating well and being able to travel. I like driving newer cars that are dependable. I like having hot water, electricity, safety, comfort. I have known life without some of these things and I really have no desire to return to that lifestyle—or worse. And as I pondered my discomfort in his question I really had to confront what I really believe. Do I trust God to take care of me in all circumstances? And could I, like Job in the passage above, bless his name even in the face of utter catastrophe? I had to admit that although I would hope so, my track record hasn't always been so great there. And I honestly couldn't answer the question. And I sure as heck knew that I didn't want to be tested by having to answer it either!

I guess I need more work, God. I guess I need to make some emergency preparations in my faith life so that I'm more ready in potential catastrophe to trust in you and your promises. But I know I can't do this alone. I need your constant help! Praise be to God!

