

Everyone Who Thirsts
Isaiah 55: 1-13
December 10, 2017

Thursday morning I wake up, and I'm extremely thirsty. I feel like I am dry from the inside out. I walk downstairs and grab a large glass of water and gulp it down. Nothing. I feel the same. I check my temperature, maybe I'm sick? Nope. Everything is normal.

I fill a water bottle, and I decide to go for a walk. I zip up my coat, put on my boots, hat, mittens, and walk out the door. I feel drawn to the river. I walk down my driveway, down the hill toward Malt O Meal, across the highway. I cut across the train tracks and walk behind Kwik Trip, toward the river, and where the Sechler Park mountain biking trails start, there's a line of people. Everyone is bundled up in coats. Everyone is carrying a water bottle like I am. They are thirsty too, I guess.

At the front of line facing everyone is a young woman. She's bundled up in a coat too. She has on one of those hoods that only allows you to see eyes and nose. Even with the coat, you can tell she is with child.

Standing next to her is an older guy with long white hair and a long white beard. He's wearing a sleek coat and workout pants and he's standing next to a bright yellow fat tire bike that has a bike trailer hitched to it.

I take my place in line with the others. The woman who is with child talks to people in front of me, one by one. I can't hear what they are saying, but the same thing happens every time. As they start their conversation, I see the person in line nod their heads, then shrug their shoulders, then the woman touches their arm for a moment, then the person in line starts wiping their face with their mittens. The woman moves from person to person in the line, same thing happens every time, and then she approaches me.

Soon it is my turn. The woman with child looks at me, smiles and asks, "Are you thirsty?" I nod my head. "Why do you thirst?" I shrug my shoulders and say, "I don't know. I drink water but it doesn't matter." The woman reaches out to touch my arm. As soon as her mitten touches my coat, I start to see images from my childhood, memories flash before me. Memories of other boys picking on me, making fun of me, memories of feeling left out and alone. Then I see beautiful images of children being included, of children receiving the gift surprising kindness from others: the best player on a little league team asking the worst player to play catch, children at a playground stopping their game of sandman to invite the child who is new to the neighborhood and standing off by herself, to play too, children confronting a classroom bully, defending the classmate who isn't like everyone else.

Tears spill from my eyes when I see these images of surprising kindness. I start wiping my tears from my cheeks with my mittens.

The woman with child says to me, “you thirst for belonging, you thirst for kindness.” “I don’t understand,” I say. “The memories of mine were all a long time ago. I’m doing fine now. I’ve found my place. But those other people I saw, I don’t even know them, but when I saw them being included, I burst into tears.”

“Yes,” she said. “You thirst for belonging. You thirst for kindness. When you don’t see it, for yourself or for others, you dry up on the inside.” When you do see it, there is nothing that is more beautiful to you. Joy swells up on the inside and it brings water, tears.” I ask, “Is that why all that is going on in our world troubles me so much? I see people not being included: the poor, the outcast, the broken? I see us all failing to be kind?” “Could be,” she says to me.

“Does everyone thirst for belonging and kindness?” I ask. “Some do,” she says. Some thirst for forgiveness, some thirst to be seen as equals, some thirst for the feeling that they will be ok, some thirst for healing, some thirst for the fighting to stop, some for hope, some thirst for comfort. What drives us up may be different, but what quenches our thirst is the same.”

She leaves me to wipe the tears off my face and talks to a few people behind me in line and then she waddles up to the front.

The whole time, this old guy has just been standing there next to his fat tire bike with the trailer. Now he starts thundering away, his voice echoing in the morning.

“Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. Listen and you will live. Seek God. Return to God. Listen for the word of God.” He stops and gets on his bike like he is ready to ride. I notice that on the back of his coat, there’s embroidery that says, “Prophesy.”

I raise my hand. The woman who is with child points to me. “What is he talking about?”

The woman who is with child says, “He’s talking about Love. Love is the true water. Listen to Love and you will live. Seek Love. Return to Love. We’ve all been pulled away from Love and it is drying us up on the inside. It is time for us to go home, home to Love. This Love will change who we are on the inside, and how we act on the outside.

“Off we go then. Follow me.” She says. “Everybody.” I look behind me and there is a long line of people behind me and more who are walking, everyone is carrying a water bottle.

Slowly, the woman lowers herself into the bike trailer that is hitched to this fat tire bike, she says, “ready.” And the older guy pedals off into the woods with this bike trailer behind him that is carrying the woman who is with child. One by one we follow them.

We step into the woods, snow crunching under our feet, winding along this path, the waters of the river always to our left.

As we walk, people start talking about surprises. A man shares a story from his life when he had been grieving and he was surprised by the kindness of a neighbor and it comforted him. A woman shares a story of being surprised by respect, being treated like a true equal. A youth shares a story of being surprised by forgiveness after he had run into his neighbor's new car when he was learning to drive. I shares a story of seeing children on the playground stop their play to welcome a child who was alone into their game. Someone else shares a story of a time when they didn't think the fighting would ever stop, but then one person decided not to retaliate, and that person did something kind, and something new happened.

The stories pour out one after another. They are warm, they are small, there's no illusion that the big problems of the world are solved and that everything is fine. But we feel like we are returning to something important. We feel like we are remembering something that matters, like remembering and telling these stories gives up hope that other surprising things are possible, and maybe bigger surprising things are possible. I wonder if I'm not quite so thirsty.

I notice two bald eagles flying low along the river. They fly back and forth staying close to us. I hear the honking of geese. A flock of geese walks up from the river bank, shakes their tails and starts walking along side us. I hear the hooves of three deer to my right, but they aren't running away, they are walking along side all the people. Birds are fluttering from tree to tree. A mink walks out of the river and slinks along as a part of the procession.

We arrive at the end of the trail, where it has always ended for me at least. The old guy on the fat bike with the "Prophecy" coat is standing there and the woman who is with child is out of the bike trailer and is standing up.

She says, "keep going, across the river, it's frozen, don't worry. I can take your water bottles if you like."

I can hear some music in the distance. It's like the hills have burst into song. Either it is windy up ahead, or the trees are clapping their hands and dancing. I give my water bottle to the woman with child. One by one, all the people behind me are doing the same, and then they keep walking across the river, towards the music, telling their surprising stories. I stop and ask the woman, "what's with the birds, and animals, the dancing trees?"

She says, "This is a lot of people returning to love. Any time people return to Love, it isn't just good for people, it is good for all of creation. The creatures are Happy, that's all."

"What happens next?"

"We're on our way to Bethlehem."

“Love will be born again. Love that changes us on the inside and love that changes how we act on the outside. Keep walking, and we will catch up.

I decide to keep on walking.