

## **“Water, again”**

**A sermon by Dan Harrison, pastor of Church of the Covenant 4/7/19**

*Isaiah 43:16-22*

*Revelation 21: 5-6*

My first face-to-face sermon with you all nearly twenty months ago came on the heels of my work at the Charlottesville protests, supporting clergy at Emancipation Park, praying for those who needed it, but most of all handing out nearly three hundred waters to the thirsty, on all sides of the conflict... hoping that cooler heads would make for more civil discourse. However, I was wrong to think that water alone could solve all the problems, but I had seen it do wonders a year earlier as I did the same thing in Charlotte, NC when a police shooting resulted in nights of protest in the hot summer. Again, there to minister to those in need, provide solidarity for the hurting and give water to the thirsty, I did the best I could, and that particular night—it was the first and only I believe in which protests did not turn to violence. This provided my inspiration for doing the same in Charlottesville the next year. Let’s say my naiveté got the better of me in some ways. However, its principal goes back to a lesson I desperately learned nearly fifteen years ago while living in the hottest place we had ever lived before: Kuwait. There in the summer, it would soar to an even 130 degrees at times, however, as I would soon learn if you were on any sort of pavement or asphalt, the temperature was much higher. By 2004, Ruth and I and the kids had lived there for a year, and had made several friends. One friend of ours, Mohammed, was a bit younger than us, but had become a close friend, and had been hospitalized for an ailment. Ruth and I and the three boys at the time, did the only thing we knew to do, and that was to go visit him there, in the hospital. So we loaded up into our Mitsubishi Pajero, a small desert SUV and off we went in the middle of a hot summer day.

We were unprepared, though. We didn’t know it at the time. We had not lived in any desert like this before, and there was no instructional manual being passed around by the locals to the expats living there, at least not that I knew of. There are signs to tell of people who know how to survive the desert and those who don’t. An obvious one is to see the manner in which a person walks in the heat of the day when the sun is blaring. If they move slowly, cautiously, then they are most likely a Kuwaiti or come from desert survivors—an ancient but important technique. The westerners could be seen rushing at a fast pace everywhere they went, often incorrectly judging the locals as slow and lazy. Another obvious sign of being a desert survivor is to always walk in the shade where is some. While westerns can be seen walking boldly in the sun on the city sidewalks in downtown Kuwait City, Kuwaitis smartly moved from shade to shade, slowly, but expertly. This was survival. And the final sign of desert roots, versus that of a tourist, was the afternoon routine. The siesta as many call it in Latin America was brought over from the Spaniards who inherited it from their conquerors over a thousand years ago, called the moors, a desert people from North Africa—and the Arabian desert dwellers in many ways their cousins preserved the same customer—and that is to sleep in the hottest part of the day. Air conditioning is only a recent technology in the Arabian peninsula, and before that for thousands of years, people survived the hottest time of the day by wrapping themselves in a cool, wet cloth, and putting themselves in a self-induced

coma (letting their body's organs slow down to where they were not exerting any unnecessary energy). This custom, minus the wet cloth, is observed to this day where a daily nap is a national expectation in Kuwait.

However, as we journeyed to see our friend in the hospital, we were not prepared. Riding in other people's cars on occasion, I would see the random extra water bottles that people kept in their vehicles, but thought little of it. Here we were on the hottest of days, travelling down a highway to the hospital, and we get a flat tire. I had changed many tires before, and thought this would be like the many others before it: Easy. However, it was not. As I got out of the vehicle, I felt the heat reflecting off the asphalt. It felt hot, nothing more nothing less. It felt like a furnace, hot. After about 115 degrees, it all feels initially the same, stifling and suffocating—and that day, on that pavement, it was probably more like 140 or even 150 degrees Fahrenheit, without exaggeration. What happened next is difficult to explain, as Ruth and the boys, wide eyed, watched me do my duty—nothing too unusual. I pulled the spare tire off the back of the Pajero's back door and that was it. I was exhausted, sweating profusely, and I must have looked it because a young Kuwaiti man stopped his car behind mine and brought me out a cold water bottle. He gave to me, knowing I needed it. I thanked him "Shukran, shukran habibi." He replied "afwan" with a big compassionate smile and then left me to my work. The thing was I couldn't get the sizzling hot metal of the jack under the Pajero's frame. My hands were burnt and then I felt like throwing up. I ran and got into our vehicle, dazed, vertigo, and couldn't self-diagnose. I sat in the airconditioning but couldn't cool down, tears were streaming uncontrollably from my eyes, I wanted to vomit, and then even I felt my bladder release. I was suffering from heat exhaustion and I didn't even know it. At that moment, in my own confused state of absolute desperation (the irony of going to attend to a friend in the hospital while I too may need medical care did not escape my distracted mind) when all of a sudden a Bangladeshi man, who served as a driver for a family, pulled his care behind ours and simply began changing the tire. I couldn't move. He did it without being asked. And when it was done and he came to the window, I offered money, but he refused. He too handed me a water, and mustered enough energy to say, "Thank you so much" as I cried. He simply smiled and walked away. I guzzled what was left of his own personal bottle of water. He had saved us. Somehow I managed to drive after a while. So, we went home and recovered. Then we visited our friend the next day.

There is something to understand about water in a desert culture. It is everything! When the prophet Isaiah proclaimed to his own nation that their God is the God of hope, the God of rescue, the one who brought forth water in a wasteland, life in death, he knew from what context he spoke—the landscape was dry, hot, a desert...

When the writer of Revelation spoke of the supremacy of God, he quoted the words with authority, laced in provision and hope. "It is done! I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of water of life without payment." When the two men stopped to rescue me that day on the desert highway in Kuwait, they gave me hope. The first man was Kuwaiti. He had money, status, and yet gave me what I needed: Water and love. The second man was a laborer in a country that paid him little, his status reflective of something similar to indentured servitude, barely above slavery. He was a commoner, a peasant, insignificant... and he gave everything to me and rescued me from death and accepted no payment. Jesus said, the "first shall be last, and the last shall be first."

This humility is love. To think of others, and not even yourselves. Go, love one another, rescue one another—feed one another and give each other life-giving water, springs of water that overflow from your heart. It starts with you and me...

Shalom