

Water Homily 5th Sunday of Easter May 18 2025 © Teresa Elder Hanlon

Acts of the Apostles 8:26-36, 38-39; Psalm 72 “Be a Blessing” Revelation 21:1-6; John 21: 3-14

When have you experienced a LOT of water? When have you experienced a shortage of clean drinking water?

When my brother died of cancer, his request was for his ashes to be buried in the waters off New Zealand’s shores. My dad accompanied our family with the box of my brother’s ashes on a trip to New Zealand. On the ferry from the south to the north Island, as “Bridge Over Troubled Waters” played on the overhead speakers, we sprinkled and threw his ashes into the water.

I remember a moment on board, of being overwhelmed by the immensity of the water. No land was visible. Everything for as far as I could see was water. I felt a power in the depth and breadth of so much water. The sea held an energy of greatness in that moment. I felt awe. I knew a deep, deep respect for her.

In today’s readings I noticed a lot of water. The Ethiopian man who gets to travel with Philip, who comes running alongside his chariot, sees water and wonders about getting baptized after they share the meaning of scripture with explanations by Philip. And there’s enough water there, even along that desert road, that when they get into it, the eunuch would be submerged, like drowning.

Baptism is a death and water symbolizes death. Baptism is also the beginning of new life in Christ and right now we are seeing, with all the green growing up in the coulees, strong signs of the meaning of new life.

Psalm 72 proposes that we become a blessing like rain that waters the earth. That our blessing of one another then, like rain, is available to all, that our rain can be kindness and compassion for anyone who might soak it in.

The first part of the Revelation reading references water that is no longer there. The old earth has died to make way for a new earth, a new Jerusalem in Christ. The living water of Christ is an invitation to drink “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty, I will give the free gift of the wellspring of life-giving water.” These words are an invitation to drink in the Spirit, to receive healing and love in times of pain and discomfort, to know Christ intimately and share, like Philip, that good news with others however you meet them.

And finally, in the gospel reading we hear that, by the Lake of Tiberias, Jesus takes on what was, at that time traditionally, a woman’s role of cooking breakfast. He welcomes his friends, his children who are out on the lake fishing to come and eat with him on the shore. He invites them to bring some of their fish that by his own instruction, came into their net.

153 fish. A lot! But in John’s gospel, Mary Coloe tells us, it is not just a lot. Numbers in the Jewish world are important and used with purpose. Because numbers are actually Hebrew alphabet letters. Each Hebrew letter carries a numerical value. So this number is interesting. Mary Coloe describes a reference to the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 47, who speaks of life-giving waters coming out of the temple. Three “branches” of water. She says a certain place name is mentioned a couple of times in Ezekiel. En-eglaim. The letters of En-eglaim add up to 153.

These references are to a temple with life-giving water flowing through. The writings of rabbis inspired by this scripture from Ezekiel mention the sea of Tiberias and that waters of life that will come to Dead Sea and bring new life and especially fish.

With the number of fish being 153, the story in John references En-eglaim and so, emphasizes the fruits of living water that come from the temple of Christ.

The temple. And whose body is temple for Christians? The stone the builders rejected is the cornerstone and we are living stones of his body, the temple of Christ where, in Revelation we heard “the free gift of life-giving water” is poured out for us to drink. I quote Coloe here, “The post-

Easter community of the children of God forms a new “Father’s household”, a living temple whose mission will fulfill the hopes for an eschatological [or afterlife] temple expressed by Ezekiel 47.” (Mary L. Coloe, *John 11-21 Wisdom Commentary* ed. Barbara E. Reid, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 544-545))

What is water? In Indigenous wisdom, water is sacred, water is life, water has a consciousness, water is a place in which we can, especially women, immerse ourselves in prayer. Christians pour out water in baptism or immerse ourselves in waters of baptism to bring new life in the Spirit. A taste of eternal life with its own fruits or abundant fish. I invite you today to share a story of a lot of water – or a shortage of water.

*Candace was a title, not a name, referring to the queens of the ancient Kingdom of Kush (present-day Sudan) who ruled from Meroe. These queens, often Latinized as Candace, were considered to be the "Queen Mother" or "Queen Regent" due to their role in ensuring the succession of the kingdom. They held significant power and influence, often acting as regents or independent rulers. Some notable Candaces included Amanitore, Amanirenas, and Natakamani, who are known for their military prowess and defense of the kingdom against the Roman Empire.

Meroe, city of ancient Cush (Kush) the ruins of which are located on the east bank of the Nile about 4 miles (6.4 km) north of Kabūshīyah in present-day Sudan; Meroe is also the name of the area surrounding the city.