

Good Friday Reflections
Old First Reformed United Church of Christ
April 18, 2014

Beth W

"I thirst." (John 19:28)



The words of Jesus from the Gospel of John 19:28: "I am thirsty."

These words spoken by Jesus are unsettling.

Here is the headline:

"Faith Healer Who Offers World Living Water Admits to Thirst."

"Zealot Who Offers the World Living Water Admits to Thirst."

In the Gospel of John, the same book of the Bible (4:13), Jesus is reported to have said to the Samaritan woman, at the well:

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

There appears to be a contradiction here...for how can the same Jesus promise us that if we accept him we will never thirst make this admission of his own thirst in this penultimate moment?

The narrator of this rendition of the story, John, seeks to provide an explanation for these words being spoken in the telling of the story:

"Jesus, seeing that everything had been completed, so that the scripture record might also be complete then said, 'I thirst.'"

The narrator's explanation appears to be that Jesus said these words, not because he was actually thirsty, but for the purposes of consistency with the scriptural record.

This is what I would call the thinker's perspective:

Jesus was working the plan. He looked at the situation, saw that everything was just about complete, and, as if he had a checklist or an agenda or a

script spoke the words "I thirst" to tie it all together. Pretty detached, or... to be clinical...disassociated, if you ask me. Not that there is anything wrong with that...disassociation is one of the coping mechanisms that human beings are gifted with to help them through the slings and arrows, ravages and traumas that are, indeed, a part of life.

Biblical scholars have, of course, presumed to identify the scriptural references that Jesus was referring to. Some scholars think it is Psalm 22 as the scriptural record referenced:

"I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death."

Others reference Psalm 69...which says nothing about Jesus's statement of thirst but rather references the response to these words by those overseeing the crucifixion:

"They put gall in my food
and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

The narrator's explanation for the words "I thirst" may, in fact, all be true...but my heart and soul are not as satisfied as my head with this explanation.

And I must confess that as one who loves Jesus and I rely on him in making my life choices, I don't see Jesus with a checklist and a big plan. I see him calling me to be less about MY PLANS and more about the love...

So when Jesus says "I thirst," I tend to believe that at that place and at that time, hanging on the cross, he was speaking what was true for him... that he knew the thirst that exists as a mortal human being. The thirst that exists for all living creatures that can be most profound when we are helpless until the rain comes.

I recall sitting with a friend in the hospital who had a high fever and no strength, lips cracking and dry...and being able to apply a sponge soaked with water to ease that sense of desperate thirst.

I think of that declaration of THIRST by Jesus not as what ties the prophecy of his life to him, but that which ties Jesus to me and to others who know and love him....for he is going before us into dead, and yes, he tells us, that

transition can include a state of extreme helplessness wherein our bodies cry out to others for help with our needs....help with our thirst.

So here are the things that I am grateful for about Jesus, the source of living water, admitting he too thirsts:

He is letting me know I am not alone in my need....my need for others to help me through a tough time. I am not alone because Jesus knows what it is like to be in such need. He has gone there before me so that in the face of dire circumstances...and even in the face of death I know that Jesus knows my need and my state of brokenness and is there with me and for me.

And, the other thing about not just Jesus' statement, but the response of the guards to it that helps me understand what Christ is saying in these words of need is about our place in the world:

Jesus made himself vulnerable in a world where the human response to that vulnerability was cruelty. The offer of vinegar instead of water to a thirsty dying man was sanctioned and accepted and unfortunately because such conduct is within our abilities as human beings...broken as we are such conduct does still occur.

But when we gather together as people of faith, moved by the story of Jesus, we know that our collective response is to insist on another way...A way of love. To offer comfort to those who mourn, water to those who thirst, food to the hungry and clothing to the naked, companionship to the lonely and hope to those who live in despair.

Just as loved by God as we are, that to provide comfort, not judgment, to that person in need...as though that person were Jesus himself.

Thank you, Jesus.