

# Where the Healing Waters Flow

Genesis 26:12-25

September 20, 2009

(Ordinary Time)

**If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**

That's what it says in 2 Chronicles 7:14. It's one of those verses you hear preachers preach on sometimes. On the Fourth of July. Or on Veteran's Day. Or when there's some sort of national crisis. Because it talks about healing. Which is something we need in our land. In our world, really. So even though it isn't the Fourth of July, I think I need to say those words to you today. Because we need healing, too. And forgiveness and grace. So I thought it might be good to say them again -- those wonderful words from 2 Chronicles 14.

But now that I've done that, let me tell you a story ... a little story about water. Because we didn't have any when I was a boy. I mean, we *had* water, of course. It just wasn't

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the kind you have here in town. Because the water in town, here, comes from a tank or a tower or a reservoir somewhere. But out in the country it comes from the ground. Right out of the dirt! And our water came from our neighbor's backyard. Because that's where the well was. The well Henry had dug. And our house and his house and the little house between us all got water from that one little well.

Which meant, of course, that if our neighbor, Henry, was outside washing his car, you couldn't take a shower. Because the pump at the well just wasn't that big. So the pressure'd be low -- so low, in fact, you'd almost have to run around in the shower just to get wet. So, whenever we saw Henry washing his car or dragging a garden hose out to the tulips, we knew that that probably wasn't a good time to hop in the shower. And we could see that clearly from our dining room window.

But we couldn't see Betty, his wife, going to the basement to wash a load of clothes. Which wasn't a problem, really, unless you happened to be all lathered up in the shower at the time. Because the pressure would get so low that you probably would've had more luck trying

to rinse yourself off with a squirt gun. ✘ And if somebody flushed while you were in there, or even turned on the cold water tap in the kitchen, you'd be boiled like a lobster in a pot! And if somebody turned on the hot water, beware! IT would suck all the hot water right out of the shower and you'd feel a sudden blast of Arctic cold that would just take your breath away and bring on palpitations.... And it would almost *always* happen when you were bending over to wash between your toes!

But the worst part of it all was that the motor on the pump that pumped the water to our house didn't run on gas, or coal, or wind, or wood. But like almost everything else in our house, the pump to the well in our neighbor's backyard was an electric pump. It ran on electricity. Which means that every time we had a storm, or a power outage of some sort, we'd have a water outage, too! Or maybe I should say a water-"inage"! Because there was plenty of water in the well. We just couldn't get it out! And this never happened at the end of your shower or even the beginning. But it always seemed to happen when you had just lathered up your hair with great gobs of shampoo. It

always went off -- the lights, the water, and everything just stopped. So you'd be stranded in the dark, all wet and soapy and steamed. I mean, really steamed.

It happened to all of us, I think, at one time or another. But mostly it happened to my brother, who was like the Charlie Brown of Wayne County, I think. Because nothing ever seemed to go his way. ✘ It even happened on the night of his senior recital at Marshall. My brother was a music major in college. Played the clarinet. (I could never imagine why anyone would. But he did. He played the clarinet. The idiot stick, we trumpet players used to call them.)

He had been practicing for months getting ready for this thing. And he was ready, I think. He was ready to perform. Even rented a tuxedo. The formal kind. With a cummerbund and tails and a little white bowtie.

And he was feeling pretty good about this, I think. Because he'd been working really hard and he knew the music well. So early that evening -- the evening of his recital, mind you -- he decided to take a nice hot shower. And just as he started to lather up his hair, the power

went off. And there was no water. And at that moment in his life, my brother was not a happy or well-adjusted person. But we brought two plastic buckets full of water, which we really should have heated first -- but we didn't. And so my brother rinsed his hair as well as he could with the cold, cold water from those two buckets. And then he got dressed.

But all of this had some ill effect on him, I think. I mean, he just seemed a little frayed around the edges, and nervous, and in a bit of a hurry. So he gathered up his music and his tux and his shoes and his clarinet (which he nearly forgot). And he headed for the car. And when he got to the car, he couldn't open the door because his hands were full. So ... he set his shoes up on the roof of the car and then he reached into his pocket, grabbed the keys, opened the door, threw his things in the backseat. And down the road he went.

And when he finally got to Marshall, he gathered up all his things -- his folder of music, his tux, his horn, everything. Everything but his shoes. He couldn't find his shoes. The really shiny black ones that came with the tux. It's what happens to a person when your shower's

interrupted and you have to rinse yourself off with cold water from a bucket. It makes it awfully hard to remember anything else. And what he had not remembered, of course, was that he had put his shoes on the car and not *inside* it. And so my brother gave his senior recital that night, with dignity and grace, in a formal black tuxedo ... and gray Hush Puppy shoes!

Let me say it again, so we won't forget. The Lord said to Solomon, **If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**

We need that. We do. We need God in this land. We need his cleansing, refreshing, life-giving grace (in our lives) just as surely as we need water. And no one knew that better than Isaac. Because he knew about God. And he knew about water .... For there was a terrible famine in the land where he lived. So he went to Gerar. Where the Philistines lived. Because the Lord told him not to go to Egypt. So that's what he did. He went to Gerar.

And things went well for him there. I mean, *really* well. And Isaac became a very wealthy man. Filthy rich, to be perfectly honest. And the Philistines weren't too happy about that. It wasn't right, they thought. Some foreigner, some *alien* just waltzes right in and hits the jackpot while all the rest of them -- who *belong* there, mind you -- aren't doing so well, at all. It just wasn't right! It just ...it made them crazy, just crazy, they were so jealous of Isaac. Because he had more sheep, and more cattle, and more servants, and even more friends than *any* of them. And they belonged there. It was their land.

So they decided that if they couldn't have any sheep or cattle or servants or friends, then *he* couldn't either. They'd see to that. And they did. They saw to it. And this is how they did it.... They all grabbed some shovels and they went to his wells. And they filled them with dirt. Just plugged them all up. And there was no water. Because Isaac's neighbors had stopped up the wells. And it wasn't the first time, mind you. They'd done it before to Isaac's father -- Father Abraham, mind you. They had stopped up his wells back in his younger days. And now they had done the same thing to Isaac!

So, there was no water. And sheep and goats and cattle and people can't last very long without any water. It's something they need ... something we all need ... every *day*, mind you. Every single day of our lives.

But the thing that's so amazing, I think, is that Isaac didn't try to get even or take them to court or somehow settle the score with these people, he just moved on. And he found other wells. The wells that his father, Abraham, had dug so many years earlier. And he took a shovel and he started to dig -- he and his servants. And it wasn't easy, mind you. There were problems, Of course, there were problems. There were people who claimed that that water was theirs and that he had no right to it. But Isaac didn't give up. He just kept digging. He kept digging and digging till all the wells were unplugged and the water flowed. And the land was healed and given new life.

**If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**

Ah ... that's what it says in 2 Chronicles 7:14. Because it isn't just water we need in our lives. We need the Lord. We need his grace to cleanse us, his love to refresh us, his Spirit to give us new life and new hope. We just can't do without him. It's as simple as that. We need the Lord. And we need him just as surely as we need water.

And yet, sometimes -- sometimes it's as if the spiritual wells in our lives have been filled up with dirt and the water just doesn't flow anymore. It doesn't flow in our land. It doesn't flow in our churches. It doesn't flow in our hearts, in our faith, in our lives (people say). Because somebody somewhere has stopped up the wells. And a lot of people spend an awful lot of time trying to tell all the rest of us just who's to blame. It's the people in the pulpits, they say. Or the people in the pews. Or it's Wall Street, or Washington, or Hollywood, even. And some people say it's all of us, really -- that we've all thrown some dirt in the wells.

But it really doesn't matter WHO did it, or HOW. All that matters is that we pick up our shovels and start digging again. Because we need the Lord. Isn't it obvious? We need his grace and his love and his presence so much.

And more people WANT that I think than ever before. People want to know that this God we Christians keep talking about is somebody real. Somebody who loves them. Somebody who cares about what happens in this world. Somebody who's with them and for them, and not against them.

And we want that, too, don't we? We want to be filled up with God's love, with God's power and grace, so that we can be who God wants us to be. And we CAN be, I think. We just need to start digging ... as Isaac did when they stopped up his wells.

But that's just it. I mean, it's one thing to pick up a shovel and scoop up some dirt. We know how to do that. But how do you open the wells of the heart and the spirit? What do you do when they get clogged up? Well, listen again to Second Chronicles, seven -- it says,

**If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.**

That's how we do it. We do it with prayer -- with long-handled prayer -- the kind of prayer that reaches down to the heart of it all and says, **God, we can't do it without you. We need your help. We need your guidance. We need your wisdom, your love, your grace and your power.**"

And that's how we do it. We unplug the wells with a shovel called prayer. For when we work, we work. But when we pray ... God works.

A young woman I know graduated from seminary a few years ago. And she almost as soon as she did, she got a call from the bishop -- not the *district superintendent*, mind you, the *bishop*, himself. And he said, **"We've decided where to send you. We want you to go to . . ."** And he named the church. And she'd heard of it... She had. Because it was not considered to be one of the "better" appointments in that annual conference. It was an old church in the inner-city. And the bishop said, "They've been in decline for the last twenty years. And there's only a handful of members left now. But," he said, "there are some wonderful people there." And he said,

"They won't expect much real ministry from you. Just go there and love them and do the best you can," he said.

And when she heard this she swallowed hard. Because it was her very first church. And it wasn't anything *like* she thought it would be. But she went. And the bishop was right it was an old church ... and in more ways than one. There weren't any young people there. Everyone's hair was snow white, she said. And they were mostly old women. And at the first board meeting she told them she always felt that God was calling her to work with children and youth. And one of them said, **"Then the bishop has to wrong church, dear. Because we're long past those years. There aren't any children around here anymore."**

But as the days went by, she began to notice more and more children passing by her study window on their way home. They weren't children from the church, mind you, they were just children. **So she started to pray.** Everyday she would pray for the church, and she'd pray for the children who walked by her window. And everyday she would say in her prayers, **"God, show me a way to minister here."**

And one afternoon, she was visiting with one of the church members -- an older woman named Gladys. And she said, "Tell me about yourself." And Gladys told her a story of an earlier time, when she had played the piano, as a girl, in a vaudeville show. And she smiled and said, "I played some of the best clubs on the East Coast. Count Basie, the Dorsey brothers -- I knew them all." And all of a sudden a light went on in that young pastor's mind. And she said, "**Would you play at the church . . . next Wednesday afternoon?**" And Gladys said, "Well, I guess so . . . if I can get these old fingers to work. But just to be sure," she said, "I'll take an extra dose of aspirin."

And that same afternoon, the pastor asked two other women to make peanut butter sandwiches. And on Wednesday, the four of them rolled the piano out through the double doors in the fellowship hall (that hadn't been opened for more than a decade. And Gladys sat down at the piano, out on the portico of the fellowship hall, and she started to play. She played a little medley of hits from the thirties, and then she played a little ragtime.

And by three-thirty a crowd of children had gathered around the portico. And Gladys moved from "*In the*

*Mood*" to "Jesus Loves Me." And the children climbed up on the porch. And the pastor told them a story about a man named Jesus. And they promised to come back next week and bring all their friends for the piano and the sandwiches and the stories and the songs.

And a year later -- just one year later -- nearly a hundred children were crowding into that church every Wednesday afternoon. And on Sundays now, the Sunday School rooms are full. And the children are taught by a group of older women who thought they were too old to have anything at all to do with children. And those children brought their parents. And the church, that everyone thought was dead, is alive and well and making a difference in that community. I mean, it's as if somebody unplugged the well... And somebody did, I think. Somebody prayed. And those prayers were like shovels scooping the dirt up out of that well, so that the healing waters of the Spirit could start flowing again in that church and in that community.

And that's what prayer does, I think. It unplugs the wells. And it leads us to God. And God is the one who really can make things happen in all of our hearts and in all

of our lives. And he is the One who can bring new life and new hope to the church, and to this community (and even to this world).

When we work, we work. But when we pray, God works. So pick up your shovels -- the shovels of prayer -- and dig out the wells of God's grace and God's love. So that this might be a place where the healing waters flow. Let's say it together, one more time, just so we'll remember. **If my people** -- repeat after me -- **If my people . . . who are called by my name . . . humble themselves . . . and pray . . . and seek my face . . . and turn from their wicked ways . . . then I will hear from heaven . . . and will forgive their sin . . . and heal their land.**

This is the word which is given for you. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Benen, OblSB

