

Water, water everywhere?

By Rev Dr Dave Bookless

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.

Psalm 63:1

We use thirst as an image of spiritual longing, but how many of us have ever been really thirsty? Have we carried water for miles, guarding each drop? In a country with showers and flush toilets 'on tap' (even with hosepipe bans), do we understand how precious water is? This year our family had a small insight when, as part of our annual Lenten 'eco-fast', we tried to survive from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday only with water we'd carried from our allotment, a mile away. It was hard work and deeply challenging.

The Bible was written in a context of 'water stress'. Professor Ellen Davis, in *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*, reminds us that the people of Israel lived mainly in marginal hill country where water was sparse. Psalm 63, probably written by King David in the Judean Desert, reflects this. In contrast, the surrounding empires of Babylon and Egypt were by huge rivers, and often used water wastefully and extravagantly (think: Hanging Gardens). In Babylon's case, this depleted the aquifers and was one factor in the empire's eventual collapse.

Scripture contains 482 references to water, from the very first mention when God's Spirit separates the waters¹, to the rivers and springs of life described in Revelation.² Water was used for drinking, for washing, for everyday purposes; it was also important for the ceremonial and the sacred. There were water laws and water wars. Yet above all, we see that water was considered vital for existence and that it was a precious gift of God. It was used for blessing, for refreshment and renewal. It is no surprise, then, that with the coming of Jesus, water takes on an even greater significance. Jesus becomes the source of living water that is completely and eternally satisfying,³ and empowers us to be a blessing to others.⁴

The Bible clearly demonstrates that water is at the heart of all our relationships – to other people, to the rest of nature and to God. Like the people of old, we take water for granted at our peril.

For reflection:

- How can we live in daily dependence, seeing water as God's precious gift?
- How can we recover the biblical principle of 'enough'⁵ in our water-use?
- What does our water consumption mean for our global neighbours, the natural world and other creatures, and for the future?
- As consumers and voters, what practical actions can we take to ensure a just supply of water for all?

Together let's learn anew about longing for God in a thirsty land and learn again to appreciate every drop of God's good gift.

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¹ Genesis 1:2

² Revelation 22:1-2

³ John 4:13-14

⁴ John 7:37-39

⁵ Exodus 16:16