

TREASURES OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

“Priming the Pump”

A sermon by Dr. J. Matthew Burton, Jr.

Central United Methodist Church

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(Exo 17:3-7 NRSV) But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" {4} So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." {5} The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. {6} I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. {7} He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

(Mat 5:6 NRSV) "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

OLD PUMPS AND ECONOMICS

When our Lake Junaluska house's porch furniture was stolen in September, the thieves also made off with a water feature that my dad made and gave to us one Christmas. It consisted of an old wine barrel sawed in half with a waterproof insert to keep it from leaking. Perched atop the half barrel was an old pump. Dad had rigged it with an electric pump so when you filled the barrel with water and turned the pump on, the water would pour through the old pump and back into the barrel where it was recycled over and over again.

Some of you probably remember those old pumps. Maybe it was your only source of water when you were growing up. You don't see those them much anymore as most people in this country have a well with an electric pump or pay for their water through a public provider. I remember being in Haiti many years ago. In most communities and towns there was only one water source, a single manual pump in the town square or in some other public location. People would bring their buckets and pails and fill them up with enough water to cook and wash

for the day. We didn't even have the advantage of a pump where we were working to build a new church. We had to draw our water out of a lake to mix the concrete. Our drinking water had to be brought to the work site from the Methodist camp where we were staying. It also had to be boiled and treated before we could drink it.

One important thing I remember about those old pumps was that you had to prime them with some water before they would work. There was a rubber washer in the pump that had to have water poured through it and then you would start pumping vigorously. Once the water began to flow, you could start pumping in a slow methodical motion and the water would pour forth.

It's interesting to me that one of the images used by economists when they are talking about kick starting the economy after a recession is "*priming the pump.*" President Hoover was the first to use the phrase when he created the Reconstruction Corporation in 1932. In 1993, President Roosevelt felt that "*priming the pump*" with loans to businesses and public works projects was the only way to recover from the great depression.

This morning we are using the image to talk about the beginning of our six-week journey together called Transformed Living. (As a side note, John Ed Mathison the author of the series has been the Senior Pastor of Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church for 38 years. It's one of the largest and most dynamic churches in our denomination.) Getting back to the image, you could say that I am priming the pump to get us ready for a six-week journey that we are going to make together. As I have tried to narrow my sermon down for this morning, I would say that the most important point I could make is that God has already committed to us. God has shown his commitment over and over again. It is time for us to grow in our commitment especially over the next few weeks.

TRANSFORMED BY COMMITMENT

All healthy relationships are held together by an invisible cord called commitment. Commitment is an island of certainty in a sea of change. We are not human butterflies fluttering through other people's lives stopping long enough to get what we want then flying off. We are human beings capable of making one thing certain in an uncertain future. That is ***"I will be there no matter what."***

That is how it was for the Hebrew People who vacillated back in forth in their commitment to God but who had a God who was always there for them. It was God who heard their cry after years of slavery and delivered them out of the hands of the cruel Pharaoh. God was faithful, spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and told him to go and help his people. God rescued the Hebrew people and got them out of Egypt and across the Red Sea.

It wasn't easy because freedom never comes without pain. Struggle comes with the territory but in the midst of the struggle, God is always there. When the Hebrew people were hungry, God fed them with manna from heaven. When they were thirsty he Gave Moses the power to strike a rock and bring forth water. God is always faithful and when the people felt they couldn't go any further he told them that the deed to the Promised Land was waiting on them and to get going. And, so, the people grumbled and pushed forward. The whole time they complained that their former captors, the Egyptians, had plenty of water.

Every pastor and leader in the church has heard the same grumbling as people complained about one thing or another. And yet—we continue to push on towards the promised land doing God's Kingdom work.

The tension is always in doing the right thing in the midst of human sin. It's hard to continue the drive towards the Promised Land when it is easier to keep people happy and be an appeaser rather than a leader. Our job is not to keep everyone happy but to be about God's Kingdom work. It takes enormous commitment.

GOD'S LOVE AND CARE

This I say with a great deal of confidence, God's love will sustain us. God's love is SACRIFICIAL. We know that because he gave us his only Son. God is a giving God. When love is young, it seeks to get. Young love is about being happy but mature love is about wanting someone else to be happy. Young love is about songs, movies and adventure. Mature love is about a wife going to the nursing home to feed her Alzheimer stricken husband even though he no longer knows her name. God's love is that kind of mature love. Even when we forget God, when we are uncommitted, God still loves us.

Being transformed by God's love means we are committed to those things that really matter—church, family, community, presence, service, prayer and giving. God's love, sacrificial love is UPLIFTING love. It's not about winning or losing an argument. It's about making sure there is a future for the generations to come. It's about doing the right thing so there will be a church for our grandchildren. God's love, commitment, is about encouraging one another and building people up rather than tearing them down.

God's sacrificial is a NO MATTER WHAT love. It doesn't matter if they are a pain in the neck or if they choose values we despise or despise values we cherish. No matter what, God challenges us to love. We are to love to the point that no matter what obstacles are thrown in our path we continue down God's path towards the Promised Land.

TRANSFORMED LIVING

A life that really matters is a life that is transformed by God's love. It is a life that is committed to those things that really matter. Rick Pann, our maintenance director came to me Wednesday afternoon and asked if I was the one who had anointed all of our doors. I asked, "***what do you mean?***" He told me that there were crosses and oil on all the door handles leading into a worship spaces—the sanctuary, chapel and Central Hall. I told him that I didn't do it. "***Do you want me to clean it up?***" he asked. "***No,***" I said. I want you to leave it.

Someone is committed to praying for this church. Oh, that we were that committed.

Years ago the great motivational speaker Zig Ziglar used to run out on the stage before his audience lugging an old fashioned, large, chrome-plated water pump. He would start his speeches by talking about why he was carrying this unique prop. He said he felt that the pump conveyed the story of life at its simplest. He would then go on to talk about the fact that if you wanted water from the old-fashioned pump that you had to prime it first.

He would then go on to say that if you expected to get something out of life, marriage, your job, church or anything else, you first had to put something in. He would then go on to illustrate, *“to many people tend to say: ‘If you give me a raise today, I’ll perform much better tomorrow.’”* Another illustration would be: *“Stove . . . if you give me some heat, I’ll put some wood in you as soon as I get warm!”*

Once the pump is primed, Zig would point out, you have to begin pumping vigorously to get the water up the pipe and coming out. If you get tired and stop pumping then you have to start all over again by priming the pump. His point was that you have to persist and be committed to whatever it is you want to do in life.

Jesus asked us to be committed to a few things. He asked us to be like Him. In other words, his presence in our lives was crucial. Also, our representing his presence to the world is just as important. Jesus asked us be servants as a part of his Kingdom work and modeled the kind of servanthood he was talking about when he tended to the least, last and lost. He taught us to pray because He thought it was extremely important and finally he talked about money and giving more than anything else because He knew what kind of hold it had over us and how it controls our lives in so many ways.

So, love as Christ loved the Church and as He gave himself for her.
Love as God has always loved us. Love so as to make a difference in
your life and the life of others. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy
Spirit, Amen.