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“All who are thirsty, come to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1).

Ezek 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-16

Schoolchildren learn early the link between civilization and rivers. World history books tell of the cradle of civilization where the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers converged in what is present day Iraq. The Bible locates the mythic Garden of Eden there, water as the symbol of life. For desert peoples, this was literally true, and founding stories reveled in the imagery of abundant life wherever there was fresh water from rivers, watering holes and wells, producing fruit trees and lush foliage.

Today’s Scripture readings invoke these images for us at a time when water is a threatened resource because of industrial pollution and plastic waste, major cities facing lead contamination in drinking water, whole countries dependent on bottled water because mining and agricultural chemicals have poisoned rivers.

The Prophet Ezekiel has a vision in Babylon of God’s temple as the source of water flowing in every direction from the sanctuary. Like Isaiah’s dream of a new heavens and a new earth, Ezekiel offers a people in exile the promise of restoration and renewed life. The fourth Gospel places the synoptic miracle of the healing of a paralyzed man in the setting of the Pool of Bethesda near the temple in Jerusalem.

The sick man has waited almost 40 years by the pool, the duration of Israel’s wandering in the desert before entering the Promised Land. Jesus asks him, “Do you want to be well?” It is an odd question, but it reminds us of the paralysis and obstinacy that had delayed Israel during its time in the wilderness. A whole generation, including Moses himself, passed away between the Exodus and entry into the Land of Canaan

The paralyzed man has been waiting for an angel to help him into the water. Instead, Jesus, with a word, tells him to rise up, take up his mat and walk. Like the story of the blind man at the Pool of Siloam (John 9:1-41), the miracle offends the religious leaders because it occurs on the sabbath.

Our Lenten pilgrimage echoes the invitation God offers through Isaiah: “All who are thirsty, come to the waters.” Jesus is the source of living water, a wellspring from within that gives eternal life. How thirsty are we, and do we want to be immersed in our baptism and all the implications of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? Life

is a desert wilderness without his life-giving water. If we want to be healed, Jesus will sustain us in the final weeks of Lent as we reach Jerusalem and share the events of Holy Week.

What more opportune time will we ever have than to celebrate Easter in a world enduring and hopefully beginning to emerge from the challenges of a global pandemic? Crisis offers us the opportunity to become community again, one world, alert to the truth that the fate of all of us depends on our care for each one of us.

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