

Living Water

- Good evening, brothers. Life is really good...we are so blessed!
- The overall quality of my life for the past 2 years has been significantly better since I hung up my career as a military engineer. Many of you told me that I would be busier in retired life than I was in my working life...and you were absolutely right!
- Our lives quickly fill up with activities of all sorts after retirement. For some of us, maybe it is part time work, or projects and chores at home, community service, church ministries, travel, and certainly a few more leisure activities than before.
- For me, the past 2 months have just flown by as they were filled with several of these different life events and activities. Let me give you a little sense of what it has been like.
 - First there was Lent. While Lent is intended to be a season of inward reflection, fasting, and sacrifice, it also brings additional opportunities for community worship and service, which Nancy and I were a part of.
 - We also worked in family birthday celebrations, a 10-hour drive to south Florida to see our daughter and granddaughter; we hosted my four best friends from high school for 4 days to rally around one of them facing a difficult time.
 - Spring time brought numerous outdoor projects to fix lawn sprinkler systems, repair and service lawn mowers, rake leaves, cut back dead vegetation, transplant shrubs, plant new flowers, and do general clean up in my yard and a couple of others I now take care of.
 - Holy Week and Easter weekend were both full of daily worship, celebrations with friends, and a few service projects.
 - After Easter, Nancy and I had a couple of intense days of getting service projects closed out, handyman work completed, and yard work taken care of before we headed to Orlando for 5 days.
 - There we helped our younger daughter, Katherine, move out of her apartment, divest of furniture, donate items to Goodwill, and then loaded up her car with as much as she could take for the start of her new life in Maryland.
 - While on the east side of Florida, we drove to Melbourne to visit our son Bryan and his wife Melanie. We enjoyed a quick visit and they shared the good news that our second grandchild is expected in November.
 - We hugged and kissed Katherine goodbye as she left for Maryland and then we started our 7-hour drive back to Navarre.
- Nancy and I were quite tired by the end of that week and the ride home was quiet. During the long quiet drive home, I reflected on the past couple of month's activities.

- I was entirely okay with the busyness of our lives and the feeling of tiredness that was at the same time satisfying. But what I wasn't satisfied with was how I sometimes lost focus on why I was so busy.
- Sometimes unexpected things popped up or didn't go quite right, like the lawn mower not starting easily, gusts of wind scattering leaves I had just raked, service providers not being helpful, errands delayed by traffic snarls, etc, etc.
- Several times I found myself agitated when things didn't go as I desired. The severity of my reaction to these things usually correlates with how tired or worn down I feel.
- While I can say I have noticeably tempered my reactions to these types of surprises compared to my reactions of outright anger in prior years, I was still disappointed in myself for voicing those agitations. Doing this steals some of the joy of serving others.
- The next week was an opportunity to sort through these thoughts, as the following day Bill Teegarden and I left for a week long silent retreat with the Jesuits in Grand Coteau, Louisiana. This feeling of disappointment in myself was something to bring to Jesus in prayer that week.
- As I left behind all the worries and wonders of my life at home and eased into this retreat, I recalled the many other times I had brought my propensity for anger to God.
- I realized that I can control my frustrations when I approach them prayerfully, but I don't remember to do that most of the time. If I could only keep my friendship with Jesus at the forefront of my mind during all life activities, I could be ready to handle those unexpected agitations.
- On this retreat, one of the first scripture readings my spiritual director had me pray with was Isaiah 55:1-9. The first verse popped out at me **"All you who are thirsty come to the water."**
- Immediately I remembered seeing the beautiful painting hanging in the common area portraying the Samaritan Woman at the Well with Jesus. I realized right then just how thirsty I am for his living water.
- Then in verse 3 I read, **"Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life."** This was Jesus imploring me to come to him with purpose and intention to hear what is life-giving instead of what is life-stealing. Remain focused on him and do not get caught up in errant thoughts.
- My spiritual director suggested that I pray with the story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well in the Gospel of John 4:1-42 and to pray with that painting. She thought the Samaritan Woman had something to tell me. She was quite right of course.

- I prayed with that painting and story for 3 days. The Samaritan Woman showed me that the long-ingrained negative patterns of our lives are not something we can change on our own.
- She did not find lasting joy in her difficult life with her five prior husbands, nor with the man she was with then. Her joy came when she abandoned everything in her past so she could drink the living water from Jesus.
- But it took Jesus' words about true worshipers worshiping in Spirit and truth before she could let go of her past completely. We cannot enjoy a deeply intimate friendship with Jesus until we face the absolute truths about ourselves.
- We have to look into our past to identify any deep shame or regrets that we are still holding onto. Only then can we abandon that at the feet of Jesus and embrace him, the source of living water.
- To worship in Spirit, we also have to abandon any expectations we may have regarding the physical and intellectual aspects of our lives as well as the specific circumstances we find ourselves in from activity to activity.
- We cannot let unexpected obstacles, attitudes, and behaviors of ours or others get in the way of our spiritual connection to Jesus. This is how we are to stay connected to the source of living water.
- It seems daunting to remain connected to Jesus as we face all the activities of our lives. But Jesus is quite aware of our imperfections and limitations.
- When I prayed about this with Psalm 63:1-9, he assured me that if I pray for his presence in everything I undertake, the outcomes of my efforts will be pleasing to him, even if they are not the outcomes I am hoping to see.
 - My successes will be his successes. My failures will be his lessons to me, and in that respect, they will be his successes.
- When we initiate our tasks asking for his help and we are successful in gracefully handling unexpected problems and setbacks, we have found some initial success. We are fully successful when we stick with the task to completion while keeping a good attitude. That complete success is due to the divine help from him.
- When we ask for his help and still encounter difficulty with agitation and grumbling, this is not necessarily a failure if we use it as an opportunity to learn from him.
 - Even if we do not complete the task to our definition of success, it is still a success for Jesus in that he patiently taught us a lesson we can apply in approaching the next opportunity with his patience and grace.
 - If we learn from him, he is still successful, even if we are not.

- As this retreat wound down, I wondered if I could keep the presence of mind to bring Jesus into everything I undertake after I would return back to the world.
- Thankfully, God was way ahead of me in showing me a way forward and then reinforcing the insights he had shared with me. This wasn't by my design, but the ACTS Men's Retreat landed on the weekend following my silent Ignatian retreat.
- I had made a commitment to a brother parishioner a year ago that I would help bring the ACTS retreat program to our parish, but I first had to attend one as a retreatant before I could be on the team giving a retreat to men of our parish.
- I did have second thoughts about going on this second retreat though. After I had signed up, our daughter Kelly and her husband made plans to fly home so we could see our granddaughter. But I had made a commitment to a friend and brother, so I was not going to renege.
- So Nancy and I had another 3 days of intense work to catch up on yard work, do a couple of handyman tasks, and get the house ready for our visitors. I was tired at the end of each day, but I was still on a spiritual high, so I never wore down to the point of getting frustrated or angry. And I looked forward to at least having Thursday afternoon and Monday to spend with my granddaughter.
- I am glad I followed through to go on this ACTS retreat. It is very different in purpose and form from a silent retreat. There is no denying the presence of the Holy Spirit. He comes amidst a loving group of brothers worshipping together in community, rather than into the silence of a single open and pleading heart.
- I am not going to talk about any of the details of this retreat. I hope that each one of you will attend one of these ACTS retreats where you will personally experience God's love for you and our community.
- But I will share with you that I was touched personally and as deeply as the silent retreat I attended. There was definitely a clear continuity between the two retreats in what Jesus showed me about myself and how I am called to love and serve the community that has shown Nancy and me so much love.
- I now know with certainty that I have been healed of old wounds by his love and friendship. And, I will always be reminded of his love and friendship every time I am in the presence of a family member or one of you, my brothers and sisters of this very special community that we share.
- And know also, that Christ's living water is poured out on you through my heart as well!

Peace Be With You,

Marc Barrett