Numbers 20:9-15, John 4:1-15

“Living Waters”

 I was all set this morning to share the good news of Jesus Christ in such a positive way that we could all celebrate and maybe even have a little fun, but what happened on Friday in Colorado, again, put a bit of a damper on that. Why do we do that? And mostly, it is people like me, young white males who feel that out of their anger, or desperation, or hopelessness, that shooting people is a viable solution and that makes sense somehow. I know also that when anything like this takes place, once again Nickel Mines comes flooding back to us and all the pain and hurt that this community went through during that time.

 Next week my sermon title is seeing God in the midst of sin, and I believe that I was probably one week off. But maybe not. This Scripture today is one that I’ve preached from numerous times and from all sorts of different angles, but once again it hit me differently this week. The action of people when they do not have the living waters of Jesus Christ, and when they feel as if their life waters have run dry produce inexplicable actions that often create a ripple effect that touches many, many people.

 Today, we are going to talk about living waters understanding that water in Israel is the most precious commodity and that most of the wars fought in that region have been and are over water. So when Jesus and the woman speak about water in what you are about to hear, it has all sorts of practical and political, and spiritual implications. Jesus’ address to this Samaritan woman is one that is supposed to provide her hope in a life that so far has been hopeless. Jesus is the last person she would expect to provide her hope because of the desperation in her life is so real and debilitating. But somehow he is able and she gets it, she embraces the living waters. I wish that James Holmes had someone provide him with that hope. But let’s read on.

**READ**

Our Exodus story picks up after the people have left Egypt and after their disobedience has banished a couple of generations into the wilderness, but once again they are thirsty and as is their habit they whine for water. God this time does respond to their leaders with a way to get water. Speak to the rock and water will come, that was God’s commandment to Moses their leader. What does Moses do? He speaks to the people and then in a show of his own power he strikes the rock twice. It works, water gushes out abundantly so that all the people and all the livestock are able to drink.

 It worked just as planned, right? No, actually, wrong. God is angry and the other shoe falls so that now the leaders, Moses and Aaron will not enter the promised land. Why? Becaue, God says: “You did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites.” Moses feels the need to show that he is able to make things right in his way. But his sin is that of a public failure to trust God to fulfill his Word.

 We have promises in the Word of God that are perfect and true and will always provide us with a way out and with a life full of hope. Do you believe that? All sin is in some way a manifestation of a lack of trust in God to fulfill his Word.

 You know, I’m not a big gun freak. I’ve shot a .22 a couple of times on a range, and a shotgun once or twice. I don’t have really strong feelings either way. It just doesn’t affect me. But guns are not the root of all evil. Why does our society, more than any other in the world, have a propensity for violence? It isn’t because of guns. If you believe that if you take away guns then there would no longer be shootings then maybe if you take away birth control measures then there would no longer be sex outside of marriage.

 No, people commit atrocities because they see it as the only solution to provide them with meaning in their lives. Jesus has a different approach in our New Testament Scripture where he states that he has living water that replaces any void that we may have in our soul. I am absolutely convinced that every single person on the face of this earth who is confronted with the Gospel that allows them to see hope and promise and possibility can provide a trust in God in promises that could then provide an opportunity to stop any actions which ultimately might manifest itself in violence.

 This past week I was asked to do a funeral service for someone who did not have faith in Jesus. No one in her family would self-profess to be a Christian in the traditional sense of the word. But one day, soon after her death and her body had been cremated and that was it, no service or anything, one of her brother’s closest friends committed suicide. He went to that funeral service in a Lutheran Church and didn’t expect anything, just wanted to pay his respects.

 What he heard and what he felt he could not describe but he said he wanted that sense of peace and closure that he had with his friend to be felt by his family for his sister as well. He had no idea of what he was getting into when he asked me to do the service and originally he told me it would be just family. But then I just found out that some friends are going to be having a big party in her honor and that they would probably be coming to the service on Friday night. So, next Friday I have an opportunity to speak about the living waters of Jesus Christ to a group that for the most part may be hearing of these promises for the very first time. Our task is to provide some hope and perspective and sense in a world that only gives us discord and violence.

 Jesus’ message to the Samaritan woman is simply that. You can have living waters that will change your life and give you eternal life. Let’s set the stage. Jesus’ ministry has taken off, in fact it is so successful that the authorities are getting nervous and he flees from the south up toward the north. We find him tired, exhausted really, sitting by a pretty popular well in the region of Samaria called Sychar or today’s town of Shechem. Now, in order to go from South to North he had to pass through a foreign territory called Samaria.

 It was an excruciating and dangerous journey. I know, I’ve taken a part of that route and walked along the path and seen the steep drop-offs and had pointed out to be ideal places where bandits could easily hide to attack, just like the story of the Good Samaritan. But he had made it, but he was exhausted. Now, I may be different from most, but I love to be around people. But when I’m tired I just need about an hour or two to watch the British Open, I’ll fall asleep for a little while and then I’m really ready to go. Probably the last thing I would want is a conversation with a stranger. I mean it’s hard enough for my family to get through to me as I’m in that twilight zone of half awake, half asleep.

 But not Jesus, he is tired but he takes the initiative to strike up a conversation that he hopes will lead to a deeper understanding of her faith. You know, I mentioned to session on Wednesday that it is possible that after a year of pushing ahead, and we have been doing a lot of pushing, some of us may be a bit tired at the well. We’ve had an increase of an average of 34 people from last year and this year, which is a good thing. We’ve had a whole bevvy of personnel changes, now this thing called the coffee house which could bring in a whole new class of people like young families with very young children. You know, enough change, let’s just coast for a while, sit by the well and catch our breath.

 That wasn’t Jesus’ approach here in his success, even for one single in the eyes of many an insignificant person. But she wasn’t just any person. A Samaritan was someone from a different race, culture, and religion. They hated the Jews and so by extension she hated Jesus. The Jews considered them unclean and a mere 150 years earlier before Jesus and this woman met the Jewish high priest had personally made sure that the main place of worship for the Samaritans was destroyed. This was looming right over the shoulders of these two in their conversations. Jesus, in Matthew 10:5 forbids his disciples when he sends them out 2 by 2 to go into Samaria. But today his journey takes him to Samaria at noon.

 She comes and he asks her for water, he takes the initiative as if he were the needy one. So often evangelism is based on the premise that we have to force on people what we have because they need it. But Jesus does the opposite, he asks her for something to show his need and makes himself vulnerable. She objects to this cultural impropriety because if he drinks what she offers he would be unclean, plus a single woman and a man at a well. The well which was a matchmakers paradise.

 Now Jesus responds and gets to work. Vs. 14 is the center of this paragraph and Jesus offers his living water that were she to drink she would never be thirsty. In fact it will be a free flowing fountain gushing up in your life, not a stagnant well that can be quickly and easily poisoned, but a fountain that will lead to your eternal life. This statement should sound familiar as Jesus says in John 7:37-38: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living waters. That is a promise.

 Here is hope offered to someone that is without hope. Why is she without hope? Why does she take all of these offers and jump on them so literally. Look at her answer to the offer of a gushing fountain of living water that will give you eternal life. That would be awesome, then I will never be thirsty and I’ll never have to come back to this place to draw water.

 What time is it when they’re having this conversation? Noon. What is it like in the desert of Samaria at noon? No one else is there because either they have come in the morning before the heat or in the evening after the heat. If you’re coming at noon you’re avoiding people. We will find out next week why she is avoiding people, but suffice it to say that she is a complete outcast, disrespected and looked down upon by her village. Her life was a mess and her state of mind was hopeless and she didn’t know what she was going to do.

 If she had access to guns, who knows? But she is totally receptive to his offer, at least all the literal aspects. Eternal life, whatever, but not thirsty and not ashamed, okay, I’m in. Jesus’ promise of living waters cannot remain fixed in the afterlife in order for it to give hope and purpose and a future for those who do not believe. There has to be some relief and promise for today. Christians hear me, what she faced was so tangible and real that she heard and understood Jesus’ promises of living waters as applying to the here and now, and it does.

 Here is a soul struggling to rise from the things of this world to belief in Jesus. You know, I can’t relate to those who have taken their hopelessness and acted on it out of violence, that has never entered my mind as an option. But I do know, and I’m guessing you have been there, what it feels like when your well is dry and you don’t see a way out and so you make a decision like Moses where you feel like you have to take control.

 Trust in Jesus who provides the living waters that will provide you with what you need to get through one day at a time until eventually you will realize that your belief has produced a gushing stream that you can go to constantly for replenishment. Amen.