

Water Justice

Sermon notes

for Creation Time 2013



Photo: [United Nations Photo](#) 

Using Amos as a starting point

‘Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream’ (Amos 5:24)

- Water was (and is) scarce in the lands of the Bible and polluted or salty water was a problematic issue, hence the need for an ever-flowing stream. Consequently, to the Bible writers generally the case for clean, accessible water was so obvious that it hardly needed stating.
- Amos 5:24 starts with ‘But’ because justice is contrasted with the behaviour of those to whom Amos is prophesying. Compare this justice vision to the vision of water flowing from the temple of God to bring ‘fruit for food’ and ‘leaves for healing’ (Ezekiel 47:12 and the preceding verses Ezekiel 47:1-12).
- In his 1950 book, *A Town like Alice*, Nevil Shute describes an Australian landowner’s amazement when he learns that the British let fresh water from their rivers run into the sea. In the West we often use water profligately (see the *Water Factsheet* at www.ctbi.org.uk/ctresources).
- Water is still not used justly. Consider areas of the world where water is a cause of conflict (between Israel and Palestine over the Jordan, between India and Bangladesh over the Ganges, between various central Asian countries where great inland lakes are drying up, and in the upper Amazon).
- How many of the world’s poorest people have access to the clean drinkable water supplies which we in the West take for granted? This is not just a matter of wells and pipelines but also of the need to reduce the pollution of sources. And where there are projects to dam rivers (for example, in South East Asia, in China and in the Congo basin) there are environmental and other challenges. Yet it rarely makes economic sense to ship water over large distances. Some parts of the world simply get too little rain to support a population which now depends on that rain whilst others still have plenty.
- Even within Britain there is inequality with the south east having what (on a world scale) is really a semi-arid climate whilst the north and the west typically have plenty. Given this imbalance, should we be acting to reduce our demand for clean drinking water, perhaps by better re-use of waste water?

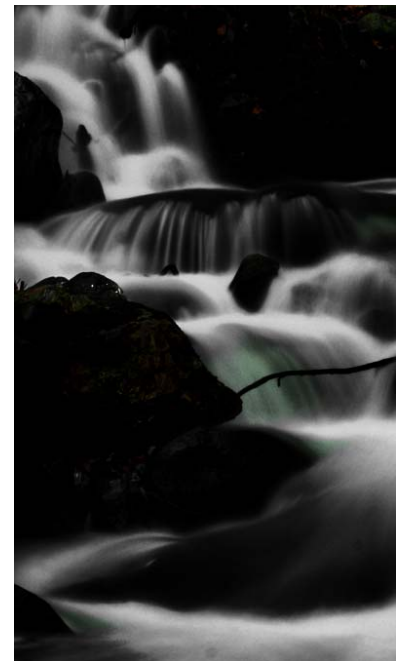


Photo: [The B's](#) 

- Climate change might affect all this in all sorts of ways. Many climate scientists predict more extreme weather events. It is possible that future generations will see higher sea levels (as the ice caps melt) but perhaps also less, or at least less predictable, rain.
- Against all these factors, what might be a just distribution of the world's water resources? And what might an ever-flowing stream be like for the world's poorest peoples?

Using the woman at the well as a starting point

The woman said to Jesus, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I might never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.' (John 4.15)

- The woman is puzzled (John 4.11) by the notion of water which neither runs out nor has to be drawn from a well. What must it have been like for women in many places in the world to spend a significant part of their waking hours collecting water from distant wells? What about those who still do it today? See, for example, [The long trek for water](#), [Water and sanitation](#), [It's all too easy to forget what a miracle water is](#). What might such women make of the endless supplies of drinkable running water from the tap with which we are familiar?
- What action are we called to take so that people in today's world may indeed 'never be thirsty' literally as well as metaphorically?

Other biblical resources

There are numerous potential Biblical starting points for reflection on water. Significant examples include:

- Land dividing water in the creation story (Genesis 1:2 and 6-9; Psalm 24:2; Psalm 136:6)
- The great flood (Genesis 6-9)
- New Testament imagery about rebirth through water some of which (such as John 3:5 and 1 Peter 3:20) draws on the great flood story
- Purification uses of water (Leviticus 14:8, 2 Kings 5:1-19, Matthew 27:24, Mark 7.3) including foot washing (Luke 7:44; John 13:1-20) and the pool of Siloam (John 5:2-18)
- Water offered to a guest (Job 22:7 and Matthew 10:42) and the woman at the well (John 4:7-42)
- Baptism imagery from all four gospels (Matthew 3, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:15-22 and John 1:19-28)
- Eschatological rivers (Ezekiel 47:1-12, Amos 5.24 and Revelation 21:6 and 22:1).



Photo: [Gates Foundation](#) 

These sermon notes were written by Dudley Coates, a local preacher in the Bridport and Dorchester Methodist Circuit and a former Vice President of the Methodist Conference.

www.ctbi.org.uk/creationtime