

## “Food is a Blessing from God”, Doug Erickson, John 7:2-5, January 17, 2016

How are you doing today? Thank you for coming to the Vineyard. Is it up to eleven below? How many churches can you celebrate and say yes it's above eleven below! Thanks for coming out today in spite of the cold weather. As Michael shared we are continuing a series of messages on...How healthy do you want to be? This week we are talking about food. So far in this series if you have been here before you've seen how healthy you want to be about faith fitness? And then last week we talked about physical fitness. I don't know about all of you, but I'm almost positive that is was the first time I have ever done burpees in a sermon at church. Thanks, John for that, it was different and it was great. And so this week we are continuing one food. If some of you are still wondering about the burpee thing, yes, we actually did physical burpees. I think John was channeling his inner Jillian Michael's. It was pretty spectacular actually!

So this week food, I love food! Especially, the five major food groups like chocolate, coffee, steak, pizza and bacon. I have great memories around food. So many great memories surrounded by food. We can think of friends and family and food is often in the middle of it. Thinking of Thanksgiving, birthday parties, Fourth of July BBQs, fresh caught walleye cooking over a camp fire, I can smell it now. I have so many great memories over family, food, folks and fun, but I also have plenty of memories about food that aren't so good. A number of years ago I led a boundary waters trip with teenagers and we put in our first day with many lakes and portages behind us. Pulled into the campsite that night and I had a few teenagers gather firewood and setting up tents and I also ask a few kids to start putting supper together. We had a long day so we sat down to supper we were very hungry and so looking forward to our meal. As we began to eat we all were looking like what is this? I think it was suppose to be spaghetti, but it sure didn't taste like it. I don't know what it was. We were trying to be patient and we were trying to be nice for a while. Until finally someone just tired and exhausted came right out and said this is the worst thing I have ever eaten, and that opened the flood gates to all sorts of comments like we could feed it to the squirrels and different things like that. It was not good. Well, unfortunately one of the people who were evolved cooking the meal took this relatively hard. We didn't mean it that way, but she was hurt. The next morning she got up before anyone else did and went into the food pack and burned all of the instructions and recipes for our meals for the week. She then took all the food packages and mixed them together with different things. So we pulled into our campsite the next night and got ready to make dinner and we had no idea what was what. We learned a lot of things that week. We learned that trying to make mash potatoes from pancake mix just doesn't cut it. We learned that flour and instant milk are not interchangeable. Let me tell you something people raisin bran and cheerios with liquid flour disgusting! And we learned that fish batter in not a substitute for the cheese in macaroon and cheese. And the end of that week when we rolled into Grand Marais and pulled into Sven's and ole's for pizza I tell you

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food never tasted so good! That week we were reminded of the fact that food is a blessing from God. It is given to us as a provision for life.

So as we continue with that theme in this series we are going to ask...How healthy to you want to be about food? When we look at the bible we see that food and the use of food are all signs of good care of God for his creation. He provides food not only for us humans made in his image, but also for all the other critters and plants that he has made. When we look at the Israelites his people we see in the Old Testament that they had feasts and fasts that were both commanded by God. Our story, humanities story began in a garden surrounded by a lush provision of food. Our story is going to end in a garden with a feast surround with lush provision of food. Trust me that great feast at the end of time with Jesus also called the wedding feast with Jesus is going to be the best thing you ever ate. The bible talks about fasts, fasts were sometimes done by the whole people of Israel. Or done by individuals in Acts in the New Testament we see the church fasting before they made major decisions. For example, like when Paul and Barnabas going to be sent out as missionaries the whole church fasted and prayed. And so there are countless stories about food in the bible, about sharing food with the less fortunate and blessing others with food. You will find that food is a big deal to God.

The question we have today is what in the heck happened? How did something that was designed by God to be such a blessing become such a problem for so many of us? So well unpack this a little bit today. We will talk about this blessing of food and we will see that we get so many confused and mixed messages from our culture about food. We are told that we should use food to celebrate and at the same time food is blamed for so many of the problems that we have. We will see that food can do some things for us and what food can't do for us. And finally, we will talk about this offer of life in abundance that Jesus offers us in the middle of difficulties and pain of life. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, we thank you for your presence here today. Pour out your Spirit out upon us Jesus. We ask for your truth and that more than anything that your truth would come out today. Father, we know that you are a good Father and that you have blessed us with this provision and this abundance of food. We know that you are a good Father that wants to bless his kids. We ask that you would just show us our broken idols, and show the places where we are trying to get life without you. Meet our thirst today. Come Holy Spirit, Amen.

So turn with me to the New Testament to the book of John chapter 7:v2 But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, v3 Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. v4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world. v5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

So John tells us that this happened just after two pretty big events, the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on the water on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples his brothers they a pretty impressed with all of this as you might image. They are encouraging Jesus

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to go public, to get out there, and to go viral if you well. People need to see this, in other words they're thinking you know what we have a hit in our hands. We got to take this show on the road. Now this festival of Tabernacles or tents basically it could read tents, was one of these Jewish feast and festivals that were commanded by God to the Jews in the Old Testament. It was a feast that happened at the end of the harvest season and it was given as a time for the Israelites to remember God's provision and care for them. It is called tents because it remembers the time after the Exodus when the people lived in the wilderness and they basically lived in tents. And even in that nomadic time where they couldn't raise crops and things like that. God still met their needs for food and God still met their need for provision. He was their only source. It was known by the Jews as the season of our Joy. It is held after the fruit harvest and it's all about celebration, joy, delight and was often called the festival of Ingathering, gathering in the harvest. They would often sign Psalm 136: v1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endure forever. And in the book of Deuteronomy 16:13 we see this about the feast. v13 Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (or we'll say tents) for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. v14 Be joyful at your Feast-you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. v15 For seven days celebrate the Feasts to the Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose. For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete. So we see here in the New Testament over fifteen hundred years later Jewish people were still celebrating this feast. And in John chapter 7:37-38 he tells us this v37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast Jesus stood and said in a loud voice. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. v38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.

What? Is anyone thirsty? They are at a feast! They are surrounded by food and drink and wine. And Jesus stands up and says "Is anyone thirsty". You know I have often wondered about his brothers at this point this after all was kind of their idea did they look at each other and say "We made a huge mistake I think little brother as lost it". What is he talking about? Did he crumple under this pressure? What is Jesus getting at? We will get back to this is a moment, but first of all I want you to keep this in mind. Jesus is still asking all of us today is anyone thirsty? To understand just what he is talking about we need to step back a little bit and talk some more about food because the problem we have today is for so many of us food is killing us. We are obsessed with food in our culture. We have prime time shows about weight loss and countless cooking shows, cooking magazines and an entire cable network dedicated to food and chiefs. And we have more and more choices in the forms of restaurants and items ect...I don't know if you can relate to this, but sometimes for me it feels like when I watch these cooking shows they are sort of the gateway drug to the biggest loser for me. I watch these shows and say I got to have and off the kitchen I go even though I don't have any of the ingredients they had on the show, but I have olives, peanut butter and tortilla chips that sounds good! And diets, we have the Hollywood diet, the caveman diet, the Atkins diet, the low carb diet or

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the all carb diet, the vegan diet, the polio diet or the ever popular eat whatever you want and worry about it later diet. Changing our food habits is really hard is it not?

The sad example of this is the story of Phil Staples. Phil was the star of the documentary *Fat, sick and nearly dead*. As anybody seen that documentary? An Australian named Joe Cross was a filmmaker and he toured the United States spreading the gospel of healthy food and healthy diet and exercise and those types of things. He told about his own story of transforming from being extremely over weight and extremely unhealthy to living a healthier life style. And in the movie you get introduced to Phil Staples. Phil was a truck driver who weighed over four hundred pounds and he was in his forties. He knew he had a terrible diet and lifestyle, but he didn't have the foggiest how to fix it. He met Joe Cross and got the healthy food gospel from Joe and he completely changed his diet and lifestyle. He lost over two hundred pounds and gained a tremendous amount of health benefits. Unfortunately, that change didn't last and in Phil's own words "I was the poster boy for successful change. For the next three years I stayed in good shape running and swimming. My diet was excellent with emphases on vegetables I had come to know and love. I had a healthy waistline bight eyes and sound sleep. I found work that I enjoyed and I spent time with my family. Most excitedly I got married after a world wind romance I pinned all of hopes and dreams on this relationship. With a track record of failed marriages I was finally hopeful that this time it would be forever. Sadly, it wasn't forever the marriage ended badly I couldn't believe that I was alone and divorced again. Time passed and my heart break didn't heal. In fact it seemed to get worse and after a few months of major depression I didn't care about much of anything. Friends and family tried to snap me out of it, but they seem to make my feelings of shame and sadness worse. I started avoiding these well meaning people and spending more and more time alone. Work became too much for me to handle and little by little I started falling into my old habits. My depression led to isolation which led to food, process food and lots of it".

Sadly, Phil did end up gaining back most of the weight and the health problems that he had lost. He did eventually end up connecting with Joe Cross and he is once again trying to become healthy. Isn't that so many of our stories? We make changes and we have growth in some area of our life and we are really making progress and than difficulties or pain or some kind of disappointments come and it's so easy for us to slide back into our old unhealthy habits. So you see when Jesus is asking us is anyone thirsty what he is asking is simply this. It anyone tired of trying to make life work on their own? Is anyone tired of using food to dull your pain? Of using food to avoid the deep disappointments and hurt that you feel? Is anyone thirsty yet? Why is this change so hard? Why is it so easy to fall back into those unhealthy habits? Because food works! Right? Food works as a mood changer. Someone told me earlier you know the other thing that makes this really hard is unlike something's we need food to live. So if I was to have a chemical addiction or an alcohol addiction or any other kind of problem I could say well I don't need those things anymore or I can stop doing that. That's not the case with food because we need food to live and we need food to strive. So you can't well that's easy I will just never eat

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again. Good luck with that. How did we use it when things go well and I'm happy let's eat! If I had a tough day grab a quick snack I know I will feel better. If I'm angry, tense or depressed or if I need a pick me up get a little treat. Or maybe things are going great I got a new job or a promotion or landed that big deal let's celebrate with food! For example, on Sunday afternoon, at my house when my favorite sport team losses in the playoffs in a game that they should have won where they shouldn't have possible lost it. I mean it's only twenty seven yards. When the games over I go into my kitchen and say what happened? There are packages and plates and bottles and everything is a mess and I think what I have done. Food it seems like we have been taught this whatever event or set back or feeling or even victory or fear or any emotion we have or experience we have food is the answer. We deserve a break today. We all want to live mas.

A number of years ago I work in a ministry where I was responsible for raising my own financial support. And I was great with working with the kids in the ministry part at least I thought so, but not so great with the fund raising part. So money and then there for food was kind of a problem from time to time like having it or having enough of it. So the all you can eat pizza buffet those things were like my friends. When my wife and I were dating at the time we would go to these things and she would be watching me in horror. What are you doing she would say. How many trips up there have you made? I would say about twenty or twenty one. How long has it been since you have eaten? I would say I'm not sure what month is this? Food became an issue for me because I wasn't sure when I would get my next meal. I wasn't trusting God to meet those needs for me. I was on a path to become really, really unhealthy like Joe Cross and Phil Staples and it has taken a lot of work. A lot of work on my part and a lot of growth in that area and trusting God, but Jesus really has changed my attitude towards food. And we all know these stories we know the health consequences. Because of these unhealthy attitudes we have towards food we have brought all kinds of health problems upon ourselves haven't we. We have more than enough food yet we are sicker than ever. Isn't that amazing? So this is the first time I realized this as I did some research for the first time in history more people are sick and dying because of too much food than not enough food. Do you see that? It's like for most of our history getting food starvation that was the major problem. Starvation was started by wars, starvation was used by wars. Starvation and not having enough food has always been the problem. We are in a very different place today.

Think of shows like the biggest loser, why are we so happy when the contestants lose weight? Why do we feel it so intensely when those competitors drop out or is eliminated? We relate so deeply to their struggles don't we? There is always that money shot half way through the series you know you have a few contestants left. And the trainers often go deep and find there is this deep pain or circumstance or something that happened in the contestant's life way back, they say my issues with food started when... Now, I'm not a medical doctor so I'm not going to get into that food and health connection, but by now we are all pretty much aware of this whole idea. We all know this connection of obesity, and diabetes and heart disease and cancer and depression.

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So how healthy do you want to be about food? You see what happen is for so many of us food has become an empty broken well. That is how we have gotten into this mess you are asking food to do something for us that it cannot do. Jeremiah in the Old Testament chapter 2: v13 My people have committed two sins: (this is God talking to the people of Israel through the prophet Jeremiah) they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. Do you remember back at the Festival where Jesus said is anyone out there thirsty, if you are come to me and drink? Jesus wants to meet our deepest needs for relationship and meaning. Notice Jesus didn't say "what is the matter with you thirsty people?" Notice also, in Jeremiah God doesn't say "people thirsty, bad, bad people". We are not condemned for our thirst. Do you see that? We are not condemned for our thirst. We are not condemned for feeling the pain and disappointment the real hurts of life. Most of us have this really deep longing in our soul for contentment, meaning, peace, joy and love. All of us have this desire to be known with all of our faults all our warts all our short comings. To have all that stuff known by someone and be accepted anyway. Jesus said in John 7:v37 Come to me and drink. v38 Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. Jesus made you and he knows you and does not condemn you for your thirst. He is offering us life. Come to me and drink. But what are we guilty of? Jeremiah text 2:13 tell us of two things one is forsaken God which means not trusting God the spring of living water and secondly digging our own wells. That is trying to change or make life work or trying to find peace and contentment without God. So thirst is a metaphor it's a picture of our attempt to make life work without God without depending on him to meet our deepest need for love and acceptance. But, we need to acknowledge a hard truth and it's not going to come as a surprise to any of you I would image. Life is hard!

When we don't get that job that we wanted or we loss the job that we have or when our children don't turn out as we expected or when cancer strikes and we are hurt and betrayed by someone that we loved and trusted or when our dreams come crashing to the ground, Jesus says to you it's ok to hurt. For some reason for those of you that trust in Jesus or grew up in the church this sometimes can be especially hard. Because too often were sold this story that all I needed to do was to trust Jesus and follow him and then life ever after will be just picking daisy's and sunshine. Dogs and cat's playing together, Vikings and Packer fans in peaceful blitzes and understanding. It's the old hymn that says victory in denial I'm happy in denial. The reality of life for many of us is so different it's because we live in this between the times of the coming of the kingdom of God and the ministry of Jesus and the consummation of that kingdom at the end of time we live in this tension of the already and not yet kingdom of God. If you have been around the vineyard for any amount of time you have heard us talk about this. It's like we approach life this sometime or at least I do. If I decide to live mas but I go to taco bell expecting a five star restaurant, a four course meal with fine wine and cheeses and two desert courses. I'm going to be really disappointed not only that, but I'm going to miss out on the glories of taco bell. I'm going to miss out on something that is pretty good it's not a five star meal,

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but it's pretty good. You see that's how sometime we approach life we expect even demand the impossible, we expect that life will turn out perfectly. And sometimes I fall into this thinking too well if I'm a good person or if I attend church regularly or if I give money or if I work hard and don't do anything to bad then life will work out pretty good for me. I won't have anything to disappointing or to painful or there won't be too much suffering in my life or if I be a good person. That is a lie.

When God's kingdom comes completely then life will be free of pain, free of loss, free of suffering then no more tears, but in the mean time life is hard! That is normal, feeling that pain that is normal, feeling this intense lonesome sometimes or that sense that you feel like you just don't fit anywhere and wondering if people would really like me if they knew what was going on inside that is normal, that is life on this side of the kingdom of God. Therefore, being real about our pain, being real about our hurts, being real about disappointment that's the way to life that is how we have what Jesus calls springs of living water flowing out of us. In order to get that living water and being aware that we are thirsty people it is just the start. Because what food can't do is it cannot met our deepest needs for love and acceptance. Food cannot take away the pain of living in a broken world. Like Phil Staples of fat, sick and nearly dead when difficulties come in life and you turn to food for relief this text in Jeremiah is asking us a simple question. What is your source of life? Is it food or is it God? Maybe some of you are thinking I don't know but I think I'm good with food. Guess what I figured out that I can make a broken well into just about anything. I have been able to make a broken well out of sex, out of exercise even, out of personal charisma having friends, of intelligence, sports ability you name it I have been able to make a broken well out of it. I mean some of these wells frankly I have been working on them for a long time and these suckers are miles deep and I still haven't hit water. So maybe food isn't your thing, but all of us are doing this and all of us are guilty these two things not trusting God with our deepest needs and make life work on our own.

So how do we if that is the case how do we develop a healthy approach towards food? A few things, first of all accept that pain and hurt is a normal part of living, deal with reality seeing things the way they really are is the first step towards health. You see here at the vineyard we are totally committed to dealing with life as it really is. We're not interested in pretending. We're not interested in putting on the happy Jesus face. When something goes wrong and people say I heard you had this set back and they say how are you doing? And you answer I'm doing fantastic! No, no, no we're not going to put on that happy Jesus face when the world is falling apart around us. We are going to be in touch with life has it really is. With the great and wonderful joyful things we are going to be happy and be able to celebrate with you and the really painful and hurtful things we are going to delve into that and deal with that as well. That is why we have prayer ministry time and small groups because when we pray for someone and a miracle comes and they are healed we celebrate and praise God for entering into that and that is fantastic. At the same time when we pray for somebody and the healing doesn't come or the kingdom of God

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doesn't come in the way that we hoped you know we mourn and we weep in compassion and we pray more for people in that too. Dealing with life as it really is. We are committing to following Jesus in the hard places of life and we are committing to following Jesus in the blessings of life. How else can we turn a healthy attitude towards food in our life? Ask God when, where, and how we use food to medicate? So when I'm tempted to turn to the fridge I try to ask myself two questions one, am I really hungry right now because much of the time I'm not, I might be bored or I might be frustrated or anxious or a little bit upset about a missed field goal. Am I actually hungry? Not really. And the second question is, what am I feeling right now that I am trying to change through food? Am I sad or depressed or angry or hurt or ect....

Here is another way that we can start to have a healthier approach to food. We talked earlier in the bible both fasting and feasting are practical ways for us to put our faith into action. Fasting from food can show our brokenness about food. Do you want to know the short cut? Do you want to know the easy route? Do you want to know the quick way or the easy button to figure out if food is a broken well for you? Try a short simple fast from just one food item, chocolate, coffee, sugar, snack foods, or whatever it might be. For a short period of time and see when you need that emotionally lift or you need that you fill in the blank. Or your inclination that you're going for and you say oh shoot I can't have that. And here is our legally representation would like me the mention before you start any kind of fast or anything consult your doctor before you do that. Some of you might want to consider a longer more intense fast. Talk about away to develop your faith muscles. I started fasting in the past and have fasting from things like chocolate and coffee, that was tough and those of you who know me would say you fasting from chocolate I don't believe it. Coffee, caffeine, sugar things that we go to to get life. Even a couple of days of trying to stay away from that oh boy did the broken wells show up for me and my life. I sure did discover how I used food when I did a forty day juice and broth fast, no solid food. By day seven I thought I was going to die at day eleven I was convinced of it, but in that I learned something else I learned that Jesus is enough. And that when I was able to set aside that physical craving and that emotion desire that I had for food I learned that not only when I was turning from my broken wells Jesus was there. That springs of living water thing is real. Out in the lobby at the welcome center we have this booklet fasting guide if any of you are intrigued by any of this and would like to read this book has a lot of information on how to fast, what to fast from, what to expect from fasting, what some of the physical gains you might benefit from, what some of the spiritual benefits might be, what you might expect. If you are interested in this pick one up.

So what else? Food is giving to us as a blessing by God as a sign of his care and love for us. It is an extravagant provision this is a good thing. You know food is a delight and so often again food and relationships and fun and that stuff gets wrap up in the memories we have or our good time with other people in sharing food with other people and building relationships and community and we do that a lot here in this body. You know food the

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taste the texture the smell it didn't have to be that way. You know that God could have made everything look and taste like a saltine cracker, but he didn't, it's a blessings. So the salt, sweet, sour, bitter or that savory steak and mushroom taste those are all signs that God cares about this and wants to bless us. And then there are the Medicinal properties of food and how food can help us in our health. And so feasting can also help us put our faith into action. What if we started looking at our feast differently in this community? You see the problem we have is that the problem isn't with the feast. The problems in our culture so much of the time we have made feast an everyday occurrence. The things that are supposed to be a celebratory once in awhile a special celebratory of God's blessing has become our everyday life. Every meal we have is a feast. We have made a regular habit of this thing and as someone has said to me recently "well it's not what you eat from Thanksgiving to New Years it's what you eat from New Years to Thanksgiving". There is some truth to that. What if in our family gatherings, or our super bowl parties or our church gatherings and what if we went out of our way to include those who normally wouldn't be invited or couldn't contribute something to the feast.

Remember back in the Old Testament the instructions we had in the feast of Tents. It said in Deuteronomy 16: v14 Be joyful at your feast-you, your sons and daughters, you menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in you towns. Remember this was the festival that Jesus interrupted with is anyone thirsty? This was a feast for everyone, for everyone. Think about that. The strangers, the servants, the widows, the orphans, everyone was invited, but what could they bring to this feast. Probably not much other then themselves I would guess. This is very interesting. What if as a community the Duluth vineyard church became known as a community that does these feasts not just here at church or our home, but in our neighborhoods all of them where everyone is invited even if they could contribute or not. What if we become a community that got together frequently? And I know that many of you are doing this already. But what if we got together to celebrate this God's extravagante provision and care for us and we invite anyone who wants to be apart this to come. If this whole idea of outreach and caring for others and using food as a vehicle and if that hits home to any of you well we have a small group for that. In the small group guide you will see in the lobby there is a small group starting in February that is focus on the hard work of feeding the hungry. What this group is going to be doing is preparing and gathering and setting up meals for our street teams that take these meals out to the streets of Duluth. So if you are interested that there is contact information in the small group guide. If some of this talk on broken wells and addictions and food if that is landing on you we have a class for that. Starting in February we will start freedom for life a class focused on identify these broken wells, identify these ways that we are trying to get life without God. If you feel the Holy Spirit pulling on your heart and feel like this is something that might be beneficial for you then check that class out. Feasting can be the celebration of God's provision and guess what we have a class for that too. In February a class called bread and wine a small group that is designed to celebrate this extravagante gift of food and celebrate it in community with other people.

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We are all most done, but again Jesus is asking all of us is anyone thirsty? How healthy do you want to be? Are you tired of using food to dull your pain or your loneliness or to pick you up when you're feeling down? Jesus offers you an invitation this morning to turn from the hard frustrating work of digging your own wells and turn to him and receive springs of living water following out of your life. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit we thank you for your presence Lord. Thank you for the blessings that you pour out on us. Especially for food and that you don't condemn us for our thirst. That what you offer us is life and you offer us is springs of living water. Lord, we want those springs and we want life that only you can provide. Give us the power to turn from our idols and give us the power to turn from these broken wells and to trust you to meet these deepest needs. We thank you Jesus, we thank you for your love and understanding and compassion on us. Amen.

If any of this struck you and you're ready to say I want that spring of living water and I'm tired of digging come and get pray today. Be led to the source of the living water, Jesus. Thank you