

Go Live to: (Living Water)

The map of Canada has a lot of blue on it and that blue represents seven per cent of the world's renewable freshwater. Flanked by three oceans, the Hudson Bay above, the Great Lakes below and the St. Lawrence Seaway in the east, Canada is a water titan and home to the third largest collection of fresh water in the world, after Brazil and Russia.

In the year 2000, I had the privilege of hearing Maude Barlow, Canadian author and activist, speak about the corporate theft of the world's water. Her message then and now is that water, or "blue gold" as she calls it, will be to the 21st century what oil was to the 20th. Her trilogy of books highlight how corporate giants, private investors, and corrupt governments are vying for control of the world's dwindling water supply, prompting protests, lawsuits, and revolutions from citizens fighting for the right to survive.

Thirty one countries are facing water shortages leaving over one billion people lacking adequate access to clean drinking water. We are diverting, polluting and depleting our water at an astonishing rate.

There is a growing movement of people who believe economic globalization is the driving force behind the destruction of our water systems. In a global economy, everything is for sale, even things once considered sacred, like seeds and genes, culture and heritage, food, air **and water**.

Governments are relinquishing their regulatory responsibilities and giant transnational corporations are acquiring control of our water through:

- the ownership of dams and waterways,
- control over the bottled water industry that is now worth \$400 billion a year
- the development of new technologies such as water desalination and purification

- the privatization of municipal and regional water services, including sewage and water delivery
- the construction of water infrastructure
- and water exportation.

The consequence of all that corporate control is that social and environmental concerns take second place to maximizing profits for shareholders. Water privatization is a crucial issue to all of us and it should be up for public debate. Power over our water needs to be held by the community through a public sector delivery system because once water is privatized, trade agreements are clear that it will go to those who can afford it, not to those who need it.

A radical rethinking of our values, priorities and political systems is urgently needed. We have to agree that water is a common good that belongs to all life on the planet. We need strong national and international laws that promote conservation and water must become a public trust guarded by all levels of government. We need to identify the capacity of our watersheds, be aware of the limits that can be placed on them. Conservation is our best chance for survival if we learn to live within our environment's capacity.

And, if we think that somehow Canada is exempt from the water crisis that is upon many parts of the world now, we need to think again. My research this week, revealed a connection to BC. A US corporation has already begun suing the Canadian government in order to gain access to our domestic water source. The first NAFTA case was filed in the fall of 1998 when Sun Belt Water Inc. of Santa Barbara, Calif., filed suit after losing a contract to deliver Canadian water to California when British Columbia banned the export of bulk water in 1991.

Water is a necessity of life and people everywhere should have access to it. By denying people the right to water, we essentially deny them the right to live. We can all agree that that is a right that belongs only to our Creator.

As Christians we ask ourselves, 'What would Jesus do?' We hear the voice of Christ respond through scripture saying, *"The poor you shall have with you always."* And *"What you do to the least of these you do also to me."* If water is sold only to the highest bidder where does that leave the poor?

The waters of the Jordan River at the time of Jesus' baptism would have been pristine. Sadly, it would bear little resemblance to the river as it stands today. In the last half century, Israel, Syria and Jordan have dammed and diverted most of the river's historic flow. The Dead Sea, sustained by water from the Jordan, is sinking by more than a meter every year. Springs that irrigated farmland for thousands of years have started to falter and fail. Wells, used by generations of people, have run dry. If Jesus were to present himself for baptism today he would find a river polluted with saline, sewage, and agricultural runoff.

The sacrament of baptism is rooted in our Judeo-Christian heritage. Whenever someone became ritually impure God commanded that, he or she partake in the mikveh bath. Mikveh means "a collection or gathering together" associated with a pool of water such as a pond or reservoir.

The water of the mikveh had to be "living water" such as running water from a spring or a river and individuals would completely immerse themselves under the water. The mikveh symbolized that a person had been given a new life of blessings and responsibilities in the community and that, through obedience, a person was spiritually clean and eligible for full privileges and service within the nation of Israel.

Through our Christian baptism we, too, have been given a new life of blessings. And to whom much is given, much is required. Our baptismal blessings come with responsibility. Within a community of faith we are called to live out God's vision for the world with a preferential option for the poor. We are stewards of God's creation. It is a kingdom we inherited from others. It's not a kingdom to be owned. Earth's resources are meant to be shared with all. We are merely entrusted with the care of creation until such time as it becomes the birth rite of generations to come.

Not long before his assassination, Archbishop Oscar Romero, wrote:

"This is what we are about: We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the Master Builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

May we find ourselves empowered to do something no matter how small it may seem. May we have faith that the grace of the Master Builder will enter into our work and in doing so, may we hear God proclaim of us that, *"You are my Beloved and in you I am well pleased."* Amen.