

Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A
[Edward Foley](#)

[Lectionary 28](#)

Exod 17:3-7

Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Rom 5:1-2, 5-8

John 4:5-42

Possible preaching themes:

- Encountering of the stranger (linked to Gospel)
- The power of hope (mostly linked to second reading)
- The gift of water (linked to first reading and Gospel)

Possible scientific resources:

- **Encountering the stranger**
 - David Berreby's TED talk on "Us and Them"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EdqxIR_w8A
 - Short article on why our brains see the world as "us" versus "them"
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-our-brains-see-the-world-as-us-versus-them/>
 - The importance of thinking of others as "individuals"
<https://www.scaruffi.com/peace/sapolsky.pdf>
 - Short video from leading neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky about hope in the face of our being hard wired to think us vs. them
<https://bigthink.com/videos/robert-sapolsky-us-vs-them-thinking-is-hardwired-but-theres-hope-for-us-yet/>
- **The power of hope**
 - Short article on how hope protects the brain
<https://bigthink.com/neuropsych/scientists-find-out-how-hope-protects-the-brain/>
 - Short article on the neuroscience behind hope
<https://www.brainhealthhacks.com/2008/10/16/the-neuroscience-behind-hope/>
 - Longer podcast on the psychology of hope
<https://alltheragescience.com/podcast/episode106/>

- Short summary article on the psychology of hope
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-health-in-the-workplace/202110/the-psychology-of-hope>
- **Life giving water**
 - Short, somewhat technical article on the necessity of water for life
<https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/uncategorized/2019/biological-roles-of-water-why-is-water-necessary-for-life/>
 - Another short, less technical article describing the critical properties of water
<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-nmbiology1/chapter/why-life-depends-on-water/>
 - Easy article on how water appeared on earth
<https://scitechinstitute.org/earths-water-where-did-it-all-come-from/>
 - Overview article with short video from United Nations about the global crises concerning access to clean water
<https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/water>

Homily outline on life giving water and the stranger: squeezing water from a rock

- **The physical need for water**
 - Some creatures can survive for days, weeks, even months without water
 - A cheetah for 10 days
 - a bat for 6 months
 - a desert tortoise for 1 year
 - a kangaroo rat for 10 years
 - Human beings don't have that kind of physical tolerance
 - Generally speaking we can last a few days without water
 - That is if we are in relatively good health
 - Water is critical for our biological survival because of many characteristics
 - Its cohesive capacity to bond with other molecules
 - Its ability to support cellular structure
 - Its buffering power against dangerous effects of acids and bases
 - The United Nations estimated that in 2019 over 2 billion people lacked access to safe drinking water
- **Where did this essential life ingredient come from?**
 - Water covers over 70% of the planet earth but this was not always so
 - Some scientists believe water is an alien visitor to earth
 - When 4 billion years ago
 - A heavy bombardment of countless meteors delivered oceans to earth
 - Supporting evidence is the existence of huge amounts of water in asteroids
 - Which scientists are hoping to extract
 - In order to establish infrastructures for surviving in space
 - Others believe that water was already inside our planet and came to the surface over time
 - Hydrous materials have recently been discovered inside the earth

- Prompting some to believe that there is more water below earth's surface than the oceans above [up to 6 quintillion gallons!]
- **Jesus as a source of living water**
 - Folk wisdom teaches that you can't get blood out of a turnip
 - But scientists are now genetically modifying plants to produce human blood proteins
 - Similar wisdom teaches that you can't squeeze water from a stone
 - Though scientists are proving that wrong as well
 - Astrophysicists extracting water from meteorites
 - and hydrogeologists extracting it from the earth's crust
 - Metaphorically one could say that the exodus people in the first reading
 - "squeezed" water out of the rock at Massah and Meribah
 - Where they "tested" the Lord
 - The Samaritan woman in John's Gospel did not have to squeeze life-giving water out of Jesus – no one did
 - Rather Jesus freely gives his life-giving water
 - Which ironically squeezes the truth out of her
 - And liberates her for true worship and discipleship
 - Jesus' life-giving water has notable and essential characteristics for sustaining Christian living
 - Jesus-water has a cohesive capacity, allowing even strangers to bond
 - His life-giving gift is essential for supporting the integrity of a faith community
 - His gracious abundance has its own buffering power against the acidic prejudice, violence and hatred that too often poisons our environment
 - Some of these effects are clearly on display in the gospel
 - Where his countercultural hospitality transforms not only one woman's life
 - But opens his disciples' eyes to the beauty of the stranger
 - And through the "holy hydration" of this one woman, an entire community is transformed into believers
- **Our Liquid Mission**
 - One powerful characteristic of water is its capacity for cohesiveness
 - Sometimes called the "universal solvent"
 - The Jesus gift is a gift of cohesion, community building, and stranger welcoming
 - Jesus does this by treating each individual, like the Samaritan woman, as an individual
 - In a word he "individuates" embracing the fact that every "them" is an individual
 - In Baptism Christians not only were graced with this life-giving water
 - but also watered, nourished, hydrated for mission
 - to be a pipeline of this infinite resource to others
 - We do so by growing as a cohesive community in justice and grace

- Jointly deploying sometimes hidden or untapped reservoirs of respect and empathy in the face of acrimony and alienation
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" memorably wrote:
 - Water, water, every where, nor any drop to drink
 - Billions of fellow human beings today have no access to clean drinking water
 - Billions more are thirsting for justice, for hope, for peace and for affirmation
- Today we reaffirm our baptismal journey
 - In solidarity with the elect who these holy days journey toward their own initiation into Jesus' life-giving waters at Easter
 - As we drink of this abundance in word and sacrament, in community and fellowship
 - We commit ourselves to be lifelines of justice, conduits of mercy, ambassadors of the shocking hospitality revealed in Jesus, our true source of life.

Tags: Astrophysics, geology, stranger, water

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary

cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.