Faith Lessons from Desert Pete

An old story I found some time ago in the desert and oasis of sermon preparation gives us some timeless lessons.

As you read it, ask God to show you how it might give rise to living water and appropriate action in your life.

A thirsty desert traveler comes upon a strange site. Before him stands a rundown hut. Nearby is a well, the only source of water for miles around. Attached to the pump is a thin baking powder can with a message inside, written in pencil on a sheet of brown wrapping paper. This is the message...

This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer into it and it ought to last five years. But, the washer dries out and the pump has got to be primed. Under the white rock I buried a bottle of water, out of the sun and the cork end up. There’s enough water in it to prime this pump, but not if you drink some water first. Pour in about 1/4, and let her soak to wet the leather. Then pour in the rest medium fast, and begin to pump. You’ll get water. The well never has run dry. Have faith. When you get watered up, fill the bottle, and put it back like you found it for the next feller. Signed, Desert Pete

P.S. Don’t go drinking up all the water first! Prime the pump and you can get all the water you want.

Now consider that you are the person who comes up to the well and are very thirsty. What will you do?

You really have two choices. Drink a little water immediately, or obey the note and find limitless water for yourself and future travelers.

So the real question is, how are you doing with that journey of faith right now? Are you gulping a few swallows and getting by, or are you looking at the larger picture and finding faith and nourishment that before that moment of discovery in the desert you did not know existed?

The wells of Palestine were a gathering spot for people on a daily basis. It was at the well that Jacob’s servant found Rachel to be his wife.

It was at the well that Jesus spoke to the woman and said, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Reading the “note” which gives us instructions for life is the Bible. It was written by those who came before us and inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

It floats our thoughts to remember those who traveled this desert before us and left behind instructions. They experienced many of the same struggles and joys that we have during our lifetimes.

We must remember that we are not the first, and certainly shall not be the last.

One of the greatest lessons the note in the can gives us is that we must (no options here) give before we can receive. Countless people have given of faith so that we might live and grow. And the only thing which matters is that which lives on after we are gone.

The note in the can points us to think of those who will travel after us. This struggle between selfish motives which can leave behind destruction and death, and a higher, better motive of thinking of others first has been going on for a long time.

Desert Pete certainly thought of you and me. And if we can think of the next person, we will, too.
Indeed, Jesus said to another group of people, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, …'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'”

So out of our hearts of thanksgiving, as we believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and God, can flow rivers of living water. What a transforming thought!

Can you see how much more meaningful our lives can be when rivers of life flow out? Instead of a sip which quenches a temporary, though sometimes ravenous, thirst, we drink of something which will affect everyone who stops at the same spot we paused to drink?

Christ our God gives out the water as we read the living Scriptures. He dispenses it as we worship with other desert travelers.

The church is the oasis we have sought our entire lives, even if we have spent the whole time before chasing mirage after mirage of misconceptions and mistakes.

God stands there at the water pump of faith ready to grasp the handle. All we have to do is raise our hearts to see him for who he really is. Has Desert Pete convinced you yet?