

When's the last time you were angry? Last month? Or maybe this week? Might even have been today. We all get angry at one time or another. It's a common human emotion. Think about how you feel when you get angry. Your body tenses up. A furrow forms on your forehead. Rapid heartbeat. And likely your breathing increases.

“To breathe hard” is one meaning of the Hebrew word (אָנָף [’*anaph* /aw·*naf*/), the word translated as “angry” in our reading from the prophet Isaiah who said, “I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me.”

Did you notice how the prophet blends together a mixture of thanksgiving and anger? That's a strange combination of emotions, for most of us don't give thanks when we are angry—and certainly not when someone is angry with us. I don't think I've ever said, “You're angry with me? Well, thanks for your anger.”

Isaiah gave thanks not for God's anger, but since God's anger turned away and instead offered

comfort. We like these emotions of God—comfort, love, forgiveness—but it's hard to relate to a God's emotion of anger. The Hebrew word used to describe God's emotion can also be translated as “displeased.” I think we can all imagine a time when God was displeased with our mistakes, disappointed with our choices.

Some believers choose to mostly focus on the anger of God, resulting in a relationship of fear. Others focus only on God's forgiveness and feel they can do whatever they want in harming others without any consequence. Sometimes it's hard to hold anger and love in balance, but those who have ever had a child know it's possible to feel both emotions at the same time.

If you're a parent, how many times have you been angry or disappointed with your child and yet still loved her at the same time? How many times did your child push your buttons and yet you could still manage to love him? If we, as humans, can be frustrated and still love our children, just imagine how much more God can continue to love us even when we mess up our lives.

2

In in our brokenness, when life falls apart, God offers us options for new life. As the prophet Isaiah said to people living thousands of years ago: God is our salvation, and we can trust in God and not be afraid. God is our strength and salvation. With joy you can draw water from wells of salvation.

Have you ever tried to get water from the ground? Getting water from a well takes a lot of work, though most of us take our water supply for granted. The earliest

dug wells were excavated by hand shovel to below the water table until incoming water exceeded the digger's bailing rate. The well was lined with stones, bricks, tile, or other material to prevent collapse, and was covered with a cap of wood, stone, or concrete tile.¹

Can you imagine having to go into your backyard and dig a big hole in the dirt with a shovel until you find water? You can dig only a limited distance with a shovel. Getting water with a giant drill today, however, is much easier since it can go more than 1000 feet into the ground.

Isaiah used the imagery of water from a well dug by hand as imagery for God's salvation. The

water is already there, somewhere under the surface of the ground. We don't create the water, and yet, we may struggle as we dig to access it. In a similar way, God's salvation is something we don't create, and yet, we know our lives are filled with struggles as we embrace what God has already provided.

How many of you struggle in life?

And yet, how many of you also know that God loves and embraces you?

Struggle and love go together, just as water and digging for it go together. God is our well of salvation.

There is one more aspect to a well—it's not just for oneself, as so well illustrated in the story of Desert Pete.²

3

Many years ago, a weary traveler hiked for miles across the desert with the hot sun beating down upon his back. His water supply was gone, and he knew that if he didn't find water soon to quench his thirst, he would surely die.

In the distance he spotted a deserted cabin, which brought hope that maybe water would be found there. He made his way to the cabin and discovered an old well. He frantically pumped the handle of the well to draw water, but all that came from the pump was dust.

Then he noticed a tin can tied to the pump, with a note inside. The note said:

Dear Stranger:

This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer in it, and it should last for quite a few years. But the washer dries out and the pump needs to be primed. Under the white rock, I buried a jar of water, out of the sun and corked up. There's enough water in it to prime the pump, but not if you drink some first. Pour about ¼ of the water into the pump and let her soak for a minute to wet the leather washer. Then pour the rest medium fast and pump hard. You'll have water. Have faith. This well has never run dry.

When you get watered up, fill the bottle and put it back as you found it for the next stranger who comes this way. – Pete

In order to have enough water for oneself and provide water for the next traveler, the note suggested that the thirsty traveler have faith that the well never runs dry. The water is for everyone, not just that one weary traveler. I wonder if that's also story about God's love and salvation—there's enough for everyone, but we need to share it, trusting that God's embrace is big enough for all. I've known religious folks who think they have figured out God's salvation for themselves, calling it a personal relationship with Jesus, while at the same time condemning those who don't believe or act like themselves. Meanwhile God's grace continues to flow into both their lives, a wellspring of salvation, plenty for everyone, if we just trust that God's wells of salvation never run dry, especially if we share a cup of grace. Drink up, the well's not dry, and offer a cup of life-giving water to anyone thirsting for God's salvation.

² www.ccphilly.org/desert-pete-faith-and-obedience/

¹ wellowner.org/resources/basics/types-of-wells/