

You brought streams out of the cliff

Psalm 28 echoes Exodus 17 – the Old Testament is full of water stories, which is not surprising given the geography of Israel and its surrounding lands. Many stories describe the Jews as a pastoral – even nomadic- people, dependent on water supplies for flocks and herds, let alone for humans. So it is not surprising that Moses is tested at Rephidim. After all, had he not parted the Nile to get them through?

Many similar themes appear in the New Testament; stories evolve at or near wells, which would of course been strategic public resources. The inland seas and rivers feature too, again as subjects for Jesus' control. Does he not walk on water? Does he not fill nets with freshwater fish?

And does St John not baptize in the River Jordan?

We are so familiar with these themes that we take it all for granted; the ancient Jews could not afford that luxury; water – and access to it – are recurring Biblical themes precisely because water was so precious.

Here in New Zealand, we have traditionally been a bit casual about water. There was always a lot of it, so you could take what you wanted, when it suited. Not so now; it is becoming an increasingly precious resource, giving rise to tension over access, cleanliness, and even ownership. Can rivers have rights akin to those exercised by humans? Do streams have a personality all of their own? The current debate is going to be difficult because it requires abandoning some old assumptions about access.

The Bible could be helpful here, because you do not need to search far to encounter tension over lack of water. There are socio-economic stories aplenty about water and its value.

Psalm 28 vv 13 -16 is particularly valuable because each verse features the word 'You' (as in 'O Lord'). The Psalmist is clear that water is a gift from God, and that God will provide if we obey certain simple instructions. This is probably the way forward.

Rather than having a debate featuring the words 'me' 'mine' or 'us', we should spend time in prayerful reflection, realizing that listening to God is certainly the answer. There is plenty for everyone as long as we discern God's plans for us and for this critical resource.

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