

**Scriptures:** Psalm 102:1-7 and John 4:7-15

**Sermon:** "A Pelican in the Desert"

**Text:** "I am like a pelican in the desert." Ps. 102:6 (Moffatt)

**Text:** Isaiah 32:1-2 "[1] See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. [2] Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land."

**Theme:** Jesus is living water for us, who feel parched and dry like a desert.

**Blurb:** Are you dry? Are you thirsty? Are you wear traveling the hot, dry road? Jesus is living water. He is the one who can change your situation. Jesus offers living water that brings life to barren waste, that brings green plant-life and colorful flowers to hard, cracking soil. Come to find out how you can have living water!

**PP#1:** "A Pelican in the Desert"

"I am like a pelican in the desert." Psalm 102:6 (Moffatt)

"See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land." -Isaiah 32:1-2

"A Pelican in the Desert" Psalm 102:6 "I am like a pelican in the desert" (Moffatt). Isaiah 32:1-2 "See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land."

**PP#2:** *Picture of us as a family somewhere beautiful on the trip.*

We just returned from our 5,200 mile road trip around the Great Colorado Plateau. Grand Canyon. Death Valley. Back through Zion, Bryce, Capital Reef, Arches, and Canyonlands national parks. We saw some of the most spectacular landscape on the planet. Canyons over a mile deep, 10 miles wide. Other canyons only 12 *feet* wide, but 800 feet deep. Sheer, blazing red cliffs 1,200 feet high. Hoodoos, arches, plateaus. Colors I never knew existed in nature. All the more fantastic, because our van's air conditioner ran well!

**PP#3:** *Picture of the desert, perhaps Monument Valley*

You see, all this fantastic landscape is part of the vast desert of the American Southwest. This time I was really overwhelmed with how many hundreds of thousands of square miles are all desert! I mean, we drove through good chunks of Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, and Utah. Day after day we drove, and we saw variations on the same theme: desert.

**PP#4:** *Picture of me by the arch in Death Valley*

I made my kids take a hike with me in Death Valley. It was 122° and blazing sunshine. And the hike was *uphill*. We wore hats and took a water bottle. We would hike for a minute, then take a sip of water. Hike another minute, take another sip. I remember the air being so hot, it felt like sandpaper when I inhaled. After about a quarter of a mile, we turned back. Our water bottle was dry, and so was my mouth. My throat burned with every breath.

**PP#5:** *Image/sign for “Forest Lake. It’s as good as it sounds.”*

I remember envisioning Forest Lake. Forest. Lake. It’s as good as it sounds! Ah, green and lush Minnesota. Land of 10,000 lakes! Reese commented one time, “Don’t you miss seeing grass in people’s yards...or grass *anywhere!*”

You know what else we never saw? A pelican! Now, why might that be, do you think? We have them here in MN. Where do you find pelicans?

OK, side note. I can’t resist. I remember when I was young my mother quoting a silly poem about a pelican. Well, I looked it up on Google and found it! It is called “The Pelican,” 1910 by Dixon Lanire Merritt, a Southern newspaper editor and President of the American Press Humorists Association. I’ll need to modify the last line.

**PP#6:** “The Pelican” by Dixon Lanire Merritt. 1910

“A wonderful bird is the pelican; His bill can hold more than his belican.

“He can take in his beak; Food enough for a week,

But [I can’t figure out how in the world he can!]

*(Last line modified)*

“A wonderful bird is the pelican; His bill can hold more than his belican.

“He can take in his beak; Food enough for a week,

But [I can’t figure out how in the world he can!]

*[Actual: But I’m damned if I can see how the helican!]*

The pelican’s adapted beak allows it fly over the water, and scoop up fish, water and all! Then, even while still flying, it can spit out the water and keep the fish in the bill. It can even store fish in it’s bill until it is hungry again!

**PP#7:** *Image of the cement pelican statue of Pelican Rapids, MN.*

The key, however, for pelicans, is water. Here in Minnesota, we have a town named Pelican Rapids, with a huge cement pelican statue honoring the amazing birds and the water. Pelicans are a symbol of water.

**PP#8:** *Serene image of pelicans and water.*

So when we read Psalm 102, where it says, “I am like a pelican...,” our mind goes to some lake in Minnesota, or for me, to the ocean by where my mother lives, there’s always pelicans sitting on the buoys.

Now, your Bible, in Psalm 102:6, might say a different bird. The Hebrew word here can be owl, vulture, jackdaw, or pelican. But I think that the King James actually gets it right when it uses pelican. It’s a poetic symbol. You’ll see why in a second.

So, keep the image of pelicans and lots of water in mind. Psalm 102 goes like this: “I am like a pelican...*in the desert!*”

**PP#9:** *Image of a pelican out of place in a desert.*

Desert? Now my mind goes back to Death Valley! 122°, scorching sunshine, the ground hard

and dusty, my mouth like sandpaper, cacti prickling against my leg.

“I am like a pelican in the desert.” What a striking juxtaposition! Isn’t this a great mental image? Can you grasp how this guy feels? He is crying out to God in a heart-wrenching lament. He is facing struggles that have rocked his world. He feels alone, he feels far from home, he feels like he is out of place.

This psalm was probably written by a Jew in exile. Far from home, everything he knew in life gone. His heart is hungry for Jerusalem, his ear is tuned to the songs of his people, but all he can hear are the pagan chants of Babylon. He feels like a pelican in the desert.

**PP#10:** Psalm 102:1-7

Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry for help come to you.

Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress.

Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly.

For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers.

My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food.

Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones.

I am like a pelican, a pelican in the desert.

I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof.

Psalm 102:1-7, “Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones. I am like a pelican, a pelican in the desert. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof.

**PP#11:** A Pelican in the Desert

Do you know what it is like to feel that way? Do you know what he is talking about? Now you may still have your home and even your family, *but does your heart cry out?* Is something strangely wrong with your life? Is there an inner longing that you are far from where you should be? Are you not doing what you were made to be doing? Is your heart yearning for something different? Do you have a nagging feeling you’re not the person you ought to be, or your not where you belong in life? Are you like a pelican in the desert?

This psalm uses this image to describe being out of place not just in location—for yes he is in captivity in Babylon—but also to describe how he feels inwardly: estranged from God, from the life he is supposed to lead. Actually, his physical location is the least of his concern. His heart is not right. He does not feel that he is right with his Lord. He is out of place at the very center of his being.

The desert here in this passage is not really some landscape you can drive through. It’s the lifelessness, the dryness, the languishing he’s feeling deep down inside. We often blame our crazy lives, or what’s happening to us, for our weariness and dryness. But what’s really going on has to do with the health of my inner being. How well I deal with what is going on around me, and what is happening to me, has to do with who I am on the inside. The desert is the desert of the soul.

**PP#12:** A Pelican in the Desert

1. Sterile - Lack of life

The desert is sterile. With lack of water, there is lack of life. There is an emptiness. How often we find this in our own lives, during the hectic pace of our every day living. We often seem caught: caught in a whirlwind, caught in a grind, caught in a vicious cycle. We just try to hold on. Our lives seem to be going nowhere: sterile. We lack purpose, drive and will: sterile.

**PP#13: A Pelican in the Desert**

1. Sterile - Lack of life
2. Still - Loneliness

The desert is also still. It is lonely. Now, loneliness doesn't necessarily mean to be all by one's self. We be lonely in the busiest of places: in cities, in Wal-Mart, at work, at the State Fair! Lots of people may be around, but they all are doing their own thing. Usually in these corporate lament Psalms, the pronoun "we" is used. But here, in this Psalm, the singular "I" is used. He even feels cut off from his own kind. The pelican is a *single* pelican. At times we can feel as if no one would even care if we died. Sure, our close loved ones would miss us, but would the rest of the world even bat an eyelash? We see the whole world buzzing around us, but we often feel alone.

**PP#14: A Pelican in the Desert**

1. Sterile - Lack of life
2. Still - Loneliness
3. Static - Unchanging

And, the desert is static. It doesn't change much. I remember driving through Arizona when I was 10. Thirty five years later, I really couldn't tell if it had changed a bit. It still looks exactly like it did in the old westerns my mother likes to watch, which were filmed there in the 1930s. How about you in your spiritual walk? Has there been much change, or is it pretty stagnant? Have you been growing into the person God intends you to be? I must admit that there are times I find myself stuck in a rut, stuck in a routine, with not much growth happening in me.

Is the pelican—are you—stuck here?

**PP#15:** “See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.” -Isaiah 32:1-2

“Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.” -Isaiah 35:6

We find the desert again, some pages later in the Bible, in the prophet Isaiah. The desert is hostile. It's hot and dry. Then, a wind storm comes up. The sand blows and stings against the skin. And then, over there, in the distance...is it a mirage?

Isaiah 32:1-2 “See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.”

Is it a mirage? No! There, breaking through the sand: water! It's an oasis! Shade from the sun and heat of the day. A place for the pelican to roost.

So what makes this change? How does water, an oasis, come in a desert? Look at it again closely. What caused this change? It is a person, a King, who will reign in righteousness. This great king will change people's lives. Because of Him, they will no longer be sterile, silent and still. The

King brings refuge. The King brings shade. The King brings living streams of water in a thirsty land.

**PP#16:** John 7:37-38

“On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and proclaimed,  
 ‘All who are thirsty should come to me!  
 All who believe in me should drink!  
 As the scriptures said concerning me,  
 Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.’”

Flipping a few more pages in your Bible, we see Jesus saying, “All who are thirsty should come to me and drink...Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.”

Jesus is the one who can change the situation. He can change the unbearable conditions of the desert into life, joy and centeredness. Jesus offers living water: water that brings life to barrenness, that brings green plant life and colorful flowers to hard, cracked soil.

How? How does He do that? Ask the woman at the well. Her life was like a desert. Why, she even came to draw water during the heat of the day to avoid the rest of the women. She was truly alone. Then Jesus appears. What did He say to her?

**PP#17-18:** John 4:7-15

7 A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me some water to drink.” 8 His disciples had gone into the city to buy Him some food.

9 The Samaritan woman asked, “Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (Jews and Samaritans didn’t associate with each other.)

10 Jesus responded, “If you recognized God’s gift and who is saying to you, ‘Give me some water to drink,’ you would be asking Him and He would give you living water.”

11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you don’t have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water? 12 You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”

13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life.”

15 The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!”

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“The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!’”

The woman was changed. It was not that she wasn’t religious or didn’t believe in God. But she was in a bad place with her life. She was not living with the Spring of Life watering her life. She wasn’t connected to the Living Water. She felt sterile, silent and still. Jesus helps her make the leap from seeing the physical well in front of them, to seeing Him as the Well of Living Water.

It is when she taps into Jesus that her life is reoriented, that her desert land blooms in joy. When you make Jesus your daily Living Water, you thrive. You become a pelican in wetlands!

**PP#19:** Isaiah 35:6, “Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”

Psalm 1 “Truly happy person[s]...are like a tree replanted by streams of water, which bears fruit at just the right time and whose leaves don’t fade. Whatever they do succeeds.”

Rev. 22:17, “The Spirit and the bride say ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”

Isaiah 35:6, “Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.” Psalm 1 talks about the person whose life is connected to God, based on God’s way, to be like a tree planted by streams of living water. It can always bear fruit. In all seasons—good, bad, harsh, desert—it can bear its fruit. It’s not the external condition that determines its lushness. No matter what is going on around it, it’s roots are drawing from the waters of life!

In Revelation there is a river described of crystal water, flowing from the Throne of Jesus. And along the river is the Tree of Life, bearing fruit for all people in all seasons. It’s always life-giving. Rev. 22:17, “The Spirit and the bride say ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”

Jesus is your source of living water, too. If you are like a pelican in the desert, ask Jesus to be your spring of cool, refreshing water. God will make streams flow again in our wastelands. Jesus promised, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” (John 7:38) Our wastelands can become wetlands!

This past week I went to the movie *War Room*. Its about a wife and husband who think they’re Christians, but who haven’t really tapped into Jesus as their living water. Their marriage struggles, their family, and the rest of their lives. But an elderly prayer warrior teaches the wife how to fight using prayer. And the wife opens her heart to Jesus, and finally submits her life to His leadership. It’s not easy, but the water of life starts to spring up. Her desert begins to bloom—for both of them—and a new life emerges. The pelican found the wetlands. Go see the movie!

A casual drink now and again—sometimes we treat Jesus this way—won’t become a spring within us. It means fully placing your life upon the spring of life Jesus is. Making His way for your life the way you live. Until you do, it’s just temporary drinks while we languish in the desert.

But I want more. I want lush, green, wetlands. I want to bear fruit in all seasons, even the seasons I’m living through right now.

**PP#20:** “‘Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come to draw water’ in ways that don’t satisfy. Forgive me from drawing from empty wells. Forgive me from only drinking occasionally. Help me to give all of me, all of the way I live, to you. Help me to drink deeply. And turn my desert into wetlands. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

If you want to open your hearts to Jesus to be your Living Water, to give Him control of your life, to ask Him to help you live differently, pause right now. Close your eyes, bow your head, and ask Jesus what the woman said. Pray this prayer. Make this the prayer of your heart: “‘Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come to draw water’ in ways that don’t satisfy. Forgive me from drawing from empty wells. Forgive me from only drinking occasionally. Help me to give all of me, all of the way I live, to you. Help me to drink deeply. And turn my desert into wetlands. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR AUG. 30, 2015

Sermon: "A Pelican in the Desert"

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself and share about a time you experienced a desert.

Read Psalm 102:1-7

1. What is the tone of this passage? What do you think is going on?
2. How does your Bible render verse 6?
3. What is the poetic image of describing the feeling of being like a pelican in a desert?
4. Share about a time you felt like that. Offer specific feelings, if you are comfortable with that.

Read Isaiah 35:6

5. How does this change the image we saw in Psalm 102?

Read Isaiah 32:1-2

6. What causes the water to come in the desert? Who is the King?

Read John 7:37-38

7. What image does Jesus use to describe Himself? What should we do about it?

Read John 4:7-15

8. What does Jesus tell the woman about who He can be for her?
9. What would it look like to drink from Jesus' living water?

Read Psalm 1

10. What is the image for why the righteous man can bear fruit in all seasons?

Read Rev. 22:17

11. What should we do with Jesus, if He is the Living Water?
12. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?