

Thirsty

“This is a really interesting trail up to Tallac. You start at Lilly Lake and go up the backside of the mountain. Not many people go that way, and the views are spectacular.” Perry Harris pointed the way on a topographical map that he was giving me. I figured if anyone knows a good trail, Perry does. I left Perry’s house with the anticipation of adventure....

A few weeks later, it was a hot September day, and the trail was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. There were some rocky climbs and a short cliff with a narrow ledge to walk across. Perry was right about there not being many people on this trail. I didn’t see anyone. Eventually, my path merged with the main Tallac trail and there was plenty of traffic—mostly people passing me while I caught my breath (admittedly, it may have appeared like I was gasping for air) every 100 yards or so.

Finally, I made it to the top of Tallac. Views of the lakes Tahoe, Fallen Leaf, and Cascade were amazing. I stayed there quite a while, enjoying plenty of snacks and refreshments. I resisted the urge to feed a rather chubby marmot that seemed to be begging. I took photos for hikers and a nice couple took my photo for me. It was a good day....

It was getting later in the afternoon and time to head down. I’d already decided not to go the way I came. I was still tired and didn’t want to chance falling off rocks or that cliff. There was another trail on the map that would take me back to Lilly Lake. It would be longer, but safer.

Just one more drink of water before I head down.... Now where is that last full water bottle...I know it’s in here somewhere...much frenzied rummaging ensues...panic is setting in...dump my pack contents out onto the rocks...no water...and yes, I’m hiking alone—again....

Dang! I’m not sure how many hours of hiking it will take to get back to the car, but it’s more than I want to go without a drink in this heat. Hike slowly enough to keep perspiration to a minimum; breathe through my nose—no mouth breathing to dry me out; beg anyone I meet for a drink; sounds like a plan. I started down....

Have you ever been thirsty, I mean really thirsty, like when you get kinda dizzy and weak you are tempted to drink out of a small lake? Hmmm, what are the odds that algae is the dangerous kind...? After a couple of hours I felt sure I was within a mile or so of the car, but I was having trouble, even on this relatively easy trail. I finally decided I wasn’t going to safely get back to the car without help. I found myself wondering if a person has to pay for search and rescue, or if being stupid gets you saved for free. As I lay down in the shade on a flat outcrop of rock, I looked up at the sky and said a prayer into the clouds....

Wait...a tumble of empty plastic water bottles poured out onto the rocks as I turned my pack upside down. Each one held a tiny bit of water—just a few drops—and one bottle even had that little bit in the bottom like what a child might leave behind and nobody wants to drink. Altogether it was about one good swallow. I was amazed how revived I felt! Refreshed, I set out only to find I was a lot more than a mile from Lilly Lake, but I eventually made it back to the car.

At the end of it all, I was amazed by how intensely I had desired water and how hopeless I was without it; I still recall how wonderful even a few drops tasted; and I am still strengthened when I remember how I was revived by those few drops. Was it divine inspiration—an answer to my prayer—that prompted me to empty out those bottles? I think it was.

I’ve thought of my experience on Mt. Tallac when I read in John’s Gospel about Jesus telling the woman at the water well, “...those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” Water is essential to life, and its absence leads to dizziness, weakness, and even death. I wonder if, in first century Palestine, being thirsty was a fact of life. For the woman Jesus spoke to, I imagine it was.

The water Jesus spoke of is the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Life that gives life to our bodies can become a spring of vitality, gushing up even to eternal life. Have we ever been thirsty for that Spirit-water? Do we realize that without it we get disoriented, weak, and can even die? Do we seek this water of life with a sense of urgency and even desperation? Where should we look? I suggest that the Gospel of John is a good place to search. Read the fourth chapter of John’s Gospel. What do you see when you read? What confuses you? What confronts you? Think, pray, and meditate on those things. Be filled.

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”
John 4:17

When I got back, I told Perry about my great adventure and the miraculous drops of water that saved me. He had these words of wisdom for me: “Don’t go hiking alone!” (he even used his “stern Perry” voice). Perry’s gone to be with Jesus now, but when I went hiking again this year, I was on the top of the mountain and I wasn’t alone. My friend, Nat, was with me—and I kinda felt like Perry was there too.

Be the church, --pastor tony