



Water for Life, Water of Life:

(based on Sustainable Development Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation)

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Today we are focussing on water – water for our consumption, and water for sanitation.

In particular we are considering Sustainable Development Goal 6 – clean water and sanitation for all – and the implications for achieving the goals by 2030.

Our earth is about 90% covered by water. It is essential to all forms of life, and yet only 1% is not salty, and of that 1% 70% is used to grow crops. So, not much is left for us and the animals. Therefore that makes it a precious resource.

In the year 2000 access to clean water was recognized by United Nations as a human need, and in July 2010 the right to clean water and sanitation was recognised as a human right by the UN General Assembly. This meant that governments had a responsibility to take the issue on board.

And yet today, across the world:

- ~ 1 in 9 people is without clean water
- ~ 1 in 3 people don't have a decent toilet
- ~ 1 child dies every two minutes from easily preventable diseases, e.g. diarrhoea

The SDG aims to provide these three things for everyone worldwide by 2030. These statistics are agreed by pretty well all the major charities working in the field [UN/ Who/ Christian aid...] That's around 2.2 billion people without safe drinking water. 844 million don't have clean water close to home [within 500 metres or a 30 minute walk]

When we think about the climate crisis which faces all of us, water is a key component in the work that needs to be done to achieve a safe world for us all to live on.

Water doesn't just need to look clean, it needs to be more than clean; it needs to be safe. It contains mineral and chemicals, and the balance of those ingredients must be at acceptable levels for it to be safe. There are instances where the soil and rocks from which water is drawn contaminate the water. For example; across the river valleys of much of Asia, where arsenic in the ground and rock poisons the waters. Thinking that this would be only near the surface, they sunk deeper wells. In Cambodia they had to go nearly 100 metres down to find fresh potable water. In Bangladesh nearly 400 metres. Once polluted, it is very difficult to remove pollutants.

We are largely water; our bodies rely on it: 30% of our bones are water; in a lifetime the saliva of each one of us could fill 2 swimming pools! And we can't live without it – yet 85% of the world's population lives in the driest half of the planet.

Consider How many things you have already used water for today?

How much water do you think each person in the UK uses on average each day? Answer: around 150 litres.

In many parts of the world water for everyday has to be collected from the nearest source – a stream, a lake, a river. Some of those water sources are shared with the local animals and insects, as well as people who bathe in it, and more. Usually it is the women and girls who do most of the transporting – women's work averaging two hours a day often, sometimes more. Those water collecting journeys can be dangerous because of the terrain they need to walk, and/or because in some places they are vulnerable to attack – violence even rape.

And have you ever thought about how heavy water is? A 20 litre can of water weighs 20kgs – the weight allowance for air travel.

Mulu [pictured right] is 10, and lives in West Shoa, Ethiopia. She collects water three times a day – a chore she hates – before and after school and before it gets dark. The family needs at least 10 jerry cans a day for themselves and their animals.

Children are the most at risk. Every two minutes a child dies from diseases which could quite easily be prevented. That's around 289,000 under five each year dying from diarrhoeal diseases: 800 per day. Imagine if your child was one of them.

Safe water means having safe water at home, free from contamination.



It is not just the natural world that presents contaminated water. We humans also contribute to 'dirtying the waters' with our activities. Today 80% of used water goes untreated, according to a report on the Global Goals in world Water week just last March. We impact the natural water cycle with dams for hydro electricity, with farming and industrial 'run offs' [fertilisers, pesticides] with deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels. Storm water run-off also gathers contaminants on its travels and leaking sewers, mining and foundry works contribute. All of this impacts availability, habitats and the quality of life, not just for people, but for fish and other wildlife.

There are people and companies working to retain and maintain the cleanliness of water, but the challenges are significant, and we all need to use water wisely and with control to ensure there is sufficient for all.

Sanitation

Across the world 673 million people still practice open defecation. That's one third of the world's population. That means they go to the toilet outside, at the side of the road, in a field, or in bushes. They have no choice.

Pictured *top right* is Monica, 17 years old, and her baby in West Point, Monrovia, Liberia. This is their toilet; you can see it is over water. Need I say more? 75,000 people live in West Point on four square kilometres of waterlogged land. It is one of Monrovia's most densely populated slums, where 95% of the houses do not have a latrine, and there is no piped water. There are four public toilets in the area; pay toilets exist, but the people cannot afford to use them. The beach is often used as a toilet, creating health hazards and polluting the waters and the fish. The 2014 Ebola outbreak took a heavy toll here.



Middle right is a toilet (but no hand washing facility) at a health clinic in Kasungu, Malawi, where mothers give birth. In the least developed countries 17 million women give birth where sanitation and hygiene are inadequate, putting them at risk of disease, infection and death.



Bottom right: washing of medical items at the Mulotana Health Centre in Mozambique; you can see the state of the water!



It should be easy to improve hygiene. Hand washing with soap is simple and effective in preventing the spread of disease, but three billion people don't have basic hand washing facilities at home, and soap is regarded as a luxury: only around 2 in 10 worldwide wash hands after using the toilet.

Climate change

Climate change is making the problems worse. It is drying up, damaging and destroying water sources. By 2040 600 million children will live in areas of water stress. We cannot wait. Action needs to happen NOW.

8 out of 10 people who currently lack water – even basic drinking water – live in rural areas, and 9 out of 10 who practice open defecation are in rural areas.

Only 15% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa have access to hand washing facilities with soap and water; only 2 in 10 schools in developing countries have hand washing facilities.

We need to do more, much more. There needs to be political prioritisation and increased funding targeting the communities most at risk if we are to achieve the 2030 goals.

Consider What are the basic necessities of good hygiene? (Proper hand washing before eating, after handling animals, playing, or going to the toilet; baths and showers to keep clean (careful use of water); food preparation; washing up, etc.)

Ownership of 'blue gold'

In some parts of the world, for example Bolivia, water companies are privatizing city water supplies and rivers, and those living in poverty are unable to pay the connection charge, or face disconnection if unable to pay the bill. 'Water carriers' charge exorbitant rates to deliver water to those not connected to a supply.

Use of water from underground aquifers in water-stressed areas, e.g. by fizzy drinks companies in India, significantly reduces the water level in wells, and in e.g. Peru, large amounts of water are used and polluted by mining companies.

70% of the world's fresh water from lakes, rivers, streams and aquifers (e.g. in Spain) is used for irrigation of produce for export.

Charities like WaterAid are working hard to deliver better standards. They map toilets and water points, helping to make accessing water a much safer activity. They educate the people about basic hygiene and support them in finding sustainable ways of improvement, working with the local population to create partnerships and find low-cost solutions using local materials [*below left and centre*]. Another initiative is teaching girls to make re-usable sanitary pads [*below right*].



Some positive results [below, l-r]:

hand-pump in India; school toilets in Mozambique; hygiene class in Zambia; 'tippy-tap' for handwashing in Mali.



In 2018, WaterAid reached:

- ~ 25.8 million people with clean water in 2018
- ~ 25.1 million people with decent toilets
- ~ 18.3 million people with good hygiene

Good progress is being made, but still a long way to go. Water Aid hope to achieve their goal by 2030:

- ~ the joy of clean water ~
- ~ improved quality of life ~
- ~ healthy happy children [and adults] ~



Target for achieving the UN SDGs: 2030. What can **you** do?

- ~ Learn about the issues, and in turn, raise awareness with others
- ~ Support those working on the ground, prayerfully and financially
- ~ Use water and other resources carefully and thoughtfully

Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently,
nourish the life of the world in our care;
gift of great wonder, ours to surrender.
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

Shirley Erena Murray (b 1931), Singing the Faith 729

Water of Life

I have talked a good deal about the facts associated with water, but Christian people also talk about the Water of Life – and they don't mean the wet stuff.

What do they mean? There are many references throughout the Bible to water, for example: Moses striking the rock to provide fresh water for the Israelites, in the book of Numbers, where at that same spot they sang a song, 'Spring up, O well'. And in Isaiah 41:18 – 'I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs.'

God has always shown his care for creation and provided what we need.

Jesus though talked about something called 'living water', using the wet stuff as an analogy for the need of something deeper within humans, something intangible, something we often search for; something that makes us feel whole, well, complete. It is something which feeds our thirst for love, for belonging, for completeness. Jesus – or rather his Spirit, which he leaves to us – is the answer. Finding that elusive 'living water' is about faith, belief and trust. When we find it we can be at peace with ourselves and with one another.

*This handout is a composite of notes from the keynote speakers at both venues.
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