Hearing the gospel today it describes like many of Jesus parables the overturning of our norms and expectations as a society. Here we hear about two sons that both answer their dad inappropriately. One ends up doing what his dad asked him to do but initially refuses. Jesus answers the people who think the first son was the better of the two by saying: “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.” It makes one think doesn’t it? It personally reminds me that humility is so important to my spiritual journey and at times so lacking. The other day I was struck by a sense of my own spiritual hubris as I listened to a woman who told me she was a “baby” Christian. She had decided a few months ago to quit drinking and follow Jesus. She had clearly had a hard life. Her child was permanently and severely disabled from injuries she suffered as a baby at the hands of her mom’s friends whom she had trusted to babysit. Mom’s sister was in jail. Life was hard for this woman and those are just two things about her life she shared with me. Yet, she made the decision to follow Jesus. Since then she’s been noticing his presence in many areas of her life. She feels that God has answered her prayers in ways that she never imagined. She feels intimidated by the Bible but she wants to soak in everything about God…she’s a sponge. Her eagerness to engage her spiritual journey is invigorating. Her faith though simple and without much foundation at this point reminds me of the faith of the prostitutes and tax collectors that left everything to follow Jesus. I admire her and them for their strong faith and belief. In a world where so much feels uncertain, where so much seems to be going wrong, I think the only place to turn is to God. We are certainly living in times that feel like they will get worse before they get better. Just this past week we heard that the policeman who shot Breonna Taylor was charged not with her murder but for the damage he did to an apartment. What’s it like to be black and think that a building is more valuable than a black life? It breaks my heart and it continues to happen over and over again. Black lives are not yet valued enough to hold anyone accountable or change this broken system, black lives are continuously undervalued in a country where white wealth and systemic privilege have taken over. This week we heard our president say that he may not value our democracy enough to concede an election if that is the decided outcome. COVID deaths have now exceeded 200,000 people and many people think it is a hoax created by the liberals. These are troubling times we are living in. The Israelites today are also struggling because they are thirsty. They are so scared for their survival they think that enslavement might be preferable. They cry to Moses and Aaron to appeal to God and God once again answers their needs. As most of you know we are in a season of Holy Days for Jewish people. Rosh Hashonah was about a week ago, in fact RBG died on that day and Yom Kippur starts this evening. Rabbi Irwin Keller wrote a midrash for his people after the death of Gindsberg and for Rosh Hashonah that I’d like to share a part of with you in minute. Keller was thinking of the death of Ruth and how our world was in so much flux right now. He remembered a time recently when he and his partner went to the Escalante region of Utah which is considered a “dark place” where no outside light interferes with the night sky. He talks about stepping out to look at the night sky: “And dominating the sky was a vast river of light – the Milky Way. So thick, so dense, it utterly ceased being individual points of light. Instead it was a liquid brightness painted with a watercolor brush. And although this light was hitting my eyes for the first time, it was all ancient light, arriving from long ago. Who knows, maybe some of it all the way back to the Big Bang. I was seeing the history of the Universe streaked right across the sky.

In medieval Hebrew the Milky Way is called *nahar di-nura*. The River of Light. After Keller went inside he thought about what he had seen and he writes the following: That night in Utah, I received the waters of the River of Light. I was able to set down, for a little while, so much of what I had been carrying for months. It was before this year's specific fire and smoke, and obviously before today's news. But still I was carrying the generalized fear of catastrophe; in addition to the isolation of the pandemic, fear for the democracy, the unceasing violence against people of color, the rancor in all public conversations, the peril to the planet itself. All those things. And underneath that burden was the grief that runs like groundwater under our feet.

"How can this be, in a Universe so splendid..." I wondered.

But for those minutes, the Milky Way, the River of Light, lifted me and drew me into a higher consciousness. It felt like the fate of the world wasn't on my shoulders; that Creation was not so much depending on my words, my actions, my ability to mobilize votes. I didn't stop knowing how much depends on words, action, and mobilization. But for a few moments I was relocated to a part of my own existence that wasn't tied to the particulars of striving or suffering or solving. A part that is connected instead to the unfolding Creation itself. For an instant my connection to the whole expanded and my importance – my self-importance – subsided.

Keller goes on to tell about a sentence in Genesis that says: "A river pours forth from Eden to water the Garden."

It is an interesting sentence because it is talking about a river of life that pours forth not in the past tense but right here and now in real time. It is the living water of God. It is the waters of our Creator God continuing to work in this world even when we feel that everything is in flux and we don’t know how things are going to right themselves again. Keller goes on to say: We are not the first generation to face tremendous danger. Dire times can drive people to the narrowest possible view – I only believe in what I can see, and what I can see ain't good.

But we all know there is more. That there are levels of consciousness deeper and higher than the headlines in the morning paper and they are moving in us too. We experience them in special moments. In the first blossom of love, or holding hands in old age. We feel it watching a symphony being performed, or the operas that RBG loved. We might feel it making art or looking at art. Studying. Singing in harmony. Dancing with abandon. Engaging in acts of radical kindness. These are real moments – even if brief – in which we might move to a different level of consciousness. Our hearts cracking open. We feel deep kinship with the strangers sitting around us in the theatre or the animals and plants with whom we just shared a walk in the woods. We also experience a shift in conciousness being close to death – being with the dying, being present at a death. This also alters our consciousness; connecting us with an awareness of the marvel of Life.”

We have a God who doesn’t abandon us when things look bleak. This is a God who suffered at the hands of humanity on a cross and still decides to be present with us today. This is a God who quenched the thirst of the Israelites when they cried out in despair. A God who quenches our thirst. Our faith and our beliefs like those of the woman I met at the hospital will help us overcome and endure many things. They will continually remind us of this living water continuing to flow here and now throughout Creation. One thing I know for certain is that the river of life is etched in Creation in our very beings as humans Created by our one God. Thanks be to God.