

Lent 3A 3/15/20
“Reflecting In God’s Wilderness”

Bringing Our Hearts and Minds to Worship

Jesus met the blind man at the city gate.

Jesus met the crowds at the edge of the sea.

Jesus met the leper in his pain.

And Jesus met the Samaritan woman in her isolation.

So with confidence we declare—

Jesus meets us here, where ever we are and reaches out to us.

For we too are the blind and the broken, the hurting and the bleeding.

Jesus meets our scars, our fears, our prayers, and our dreams.

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, when it comes to our faith, we know we could learn from the Samaritan woman who ran through the streets singing your name. So forgive us for the times when we remain silent about what our faith means to us. Forgive us for the times when we choose comfort over bravery. And forgive us for the times we shut people out, missing opportunities to run into you. Teach us to be brave like the Samaritan woman, and saturate our thirst for that which leaves us thirsty. With hope and gratitude, we confess. With hope and gratitude, we pray. Amen

Scripture Reading: John 4:5-42

So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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.”

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.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.”

The woman answered him, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word.

They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Sermon:

The story of the woman at the well is incredibly rich. There are several details that let us know what is going on under the surface. For example, we are told that it is noon when Jesus comes to sit by the well. A woman comes up to draw water and Jesus begins a conversation with her. The important detail is that it was noon. Women usually came to draw water from the well early in the morning, not in the heat of the midday sun. There is a reason she came at this time, because she dared not join the town's women who came early not only to get water but to share the latest news. This woman was an outcast and as such was not welcome among her own. Her's was a lonely life.

I imagine that when she came to the well that day, she was surprised to see Jesus sitting there- and even more surprised when he spoke to her. Not only was she an outcast in her own town; but when next to Jesus, there was no reason he should acknowledge she was there, let alone ask her for a drink. The Samaritans and the Jews, you see, did not usually associate with each other. The hatred between these two peoples went back to when the northern kingdom of Israel was overrun by Assyria. The Assyrians resettled Samaria with foreigners loyal to them, along with Israelites not taken captive. While Samaritans continued some Jewish practices and beliefs, they were viewed as outsiders to Judaism. The separation grew over the centuries, so much so that by the time of Jesus, the enmity between the two peoples was severe.

So this woman had several strikes against her that would prohibit Jesus from speaking to her- she was a woman, she was a Samaritan and she also was an outcast even among her own people. Why then did Jesus strike up a conversation- and not just a conversation but asked her to help him by getting him some water?

Jesus proves time and again that those whom humanity has decided are outsiders, are in fact not in the eyes of God. Jesus crosses several boundaries throughout his ministry- touching lepers, healing on the Sabbath, letting children come to him, and speaking to a Samaritan woman. Jesus is not afraid to reach out to this woman and offer his life-giving touch- a touch which began a transformation process within her, a touch in which he left his mark, his fingerprint on her life.

As we reflect in the wilderness, we remember that we are not alone. Here is a woman who felt abandoned and alone even among her community, yet Jesus reaches out to her ignoring social norms to show her that he sees her for who she is. Jesus' action reminds us that we must also reach out to those who have been drawn outside our human boundaries- whether those boundaries are social, economical, racial, based on abilities or disabilities, or religious.

This text is a reminder to us that sometimes we tend to draw the boundaries of our community too narrow. It causes us to sit for at least a minute with an uncomfortable question... who may we be tempted to leave out? Who would we prefer to be safely outside these doors?

And when we find an answer to who, are we willing to do something about it? Are we willing to, like Jesus, cross boundaries and reach out a hand to our neighbors in the name of Christ?

These are tough questions. It would be simpler if Jesus encouraged us to keep the status quo. But that is not the character of the God we worship. For we worship a God of remarkable reversals:

A God who breaks boundaries;

a God who reaches out across lines that divide with love and grace.

Compassion and transformation are at the heart of Jesus' ministry as evidenced, in part, by this encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. He begins by asking her for a simple drink of water, but quickly changes the meaning of the word water into a conversation about the life-giving water which Jesus offers.

When she realizes who Jesus is and what he is talking about, she is quick to accept it. In fact, she goes back to the village and tells everyone in the town about Jesus and what he said to her. This is a remarkable reversal for someone who took great pains not to talk to the people of her town. And what an incredible witness she became. The town welcomed Jesus in their midst and they too received the good news of Jesus' life-giving water.

Life can be full of reversals: The woman at the well simply came to fetch a bucket of water for her household, but left with Jesus' offer of new life.

The possibility is there for reversals in our own lives as well. We considered the people who may seem to be outside our boundaries and how we might be moved to reverse and break those boundaries in the name of God.

Yet, perhaps we too are in need of God's life-giving water- water that brings a reversal to the way we experience life. So, imagine that you are this woman having a conversation with Jesus. What are you seeking? What do you receive?

Perhaps you go through life wearing the lens of negativity, doubt, loneliness, hopelessness, anger, suspicion, or fear. Perhaps you feel shut out or unworthy of fully participating in some aspect of your life.

Can you approach Jesus and receive his life-giving water-
water that will quench your thirst;

wash away your despair, fear or suspicion;

remind you that you are worthy and loved?

For God has declared that we belong, that we are valued and no one can take that away from us.

The woman at the well reminds us that, even when we are seeking, and thirsting, and believing ourselves in need, God may already be providing what we seek. In the midst of our wilderness journey's, we can discover that God provides the refreshment we so desperately desire. May we come to this stream of life-giving water and drink deeply.

Prayers of the People

Holy God, as we find ourselves in strange and uncertain times. Yet we remember that you are unfailing and that nothing we face is beyond your reach. Therefore we celebrate your love for us, your presence with us, and the way your life flows through us.

We know that you are a mystery, a mystery we will never fully understand, and yet we know your healing presence in the care that we receive, often from the most unexpected sources.

We pray that you will lift our burdens from us: bring peace to those who grieve, health to those who are in pain, and comfort to those who are anxious.

We pray for government leaders and health care workers around the world as they work to control this virus, care for those who are ill and keep people safe.

We pray for those for whom the changes in our community will bring extra hardship-
For those who do not have childcare,
For those who depend on shelters and other community gatherings for meals,
For those for whom staying home from work means worrying about paying the rent or buying food.
For those who are particularly vulnerable to this virus.

Help us to be your hands and feet in the world, even if we can't gather. May we find ways of connecting with one another and lifting the burden from others in any way we can.

As we reflect in the wilderness, we bring the individual cares and concerns of our hearts to you....

Placing our trust in you who are ever faithful, we give you our love, our lives and our praise. Amen.

Benediction:

Though life is full of times of trial, Christ walks with us every step of the way.

And so we rejoice in the one who shares our journey.
Though life is full of obstacles to faith, the Spirit eases our burden.
And so we rejoice in the one who leads us home.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, rest, rule and abide in your hearts now and forevermore.