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Sunday, March 15, 2020
Third Sunday in Lent

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

Merciful God, the fountain of living water, You quench our thirst and wash away our sin. Give us this water always. Bring us to drink from the well that flows with the beauty of Your truth through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

(Prayer of the Day for the Third Sunday in Lent, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Readings and Psalm

- **Exodus 17:1-7** *Water from the rock in the wilderness*
- **Psalm 95** *Let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. (Ps. 95:1)*
- **Romans 5:1-11** *Reconciled to God by Christ's death*
- **John 4:5-42** *Baptismal image: the woman at the well*

The Holy Gospel according to John 4:5-42, NRSV (<https://www.biblegateway.com>)

⁵ So he (Jesus) came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ 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.)^[a] ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.”¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’;¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you^[b] say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ 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.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”²⁵ 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.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he,^[c] the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷ 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?”²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah,^[d] can he?”³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.”³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.³⁵ 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.³⁶ The reaper is already receiving^[e] wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans

came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² 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

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on this Third Sunday in Lent. Amen.

For those of you who are not able to be in your place of worship today, I hope you were sitting down for the gospel reading. It was a long one! I can tell you that the gospel readings for the next two Sundays are just as long!

Most of us have not experienced the worldly situation we are living in today.

We have come to learn about new terms; the first term being “COVID-19”. Many people still refer to this as “the coronavirus” because that’s the first term we heard when this disease was announced. I’ll admit, I had to research coronavirus because I had received messages and texts stating that the word “coronavirus” was already listed on containers of disinfecting wipes.

The confusion was, if the word “coronavirus” was listed on containers already in our kitchen cabinets, then it obviously has been around a while, correct? Wrong. While there are many different kinds of coronaviruses which can cause mild illness, such as the common cold, this new virus, COVID-19, named such because it was discovered in 2019, can cause deadly respiratory disease and even death, as we have seen already in the United States and around the world.

Yes, and I’ve heard it many times in conversations on the news and social media that more deaths are attributed to the flu than what have been reported with COVID-19 so far. True. If other world health organizations and governments are providing correct data, then yes, more people have walked on from the flu than have from COVID-19.

The difficulty with comparing the flu to the coronavirus, COVID-19, is that the flu has a vaccine. Most of us all have the option to receive a flu shot each

year. While I understand some have underlying health conditions that prohibit them from getting a flu shot, I know there are a lot of people that COULD get the shot but prefer not to.

Not only doesn't COVID-19 currently have a vaccine to help prevent people from getting it, there is no cure for it. There are certain medicines that people with the flu can take to help alleviate the disease. That isn't the case with COVID-19. Not at this point, anyway.

According to the World Health Organization, isolating oneself if infected is the best prevention of transmitting it to others since there is no cure. Of course, if the person starts experiencing respiratory distress, I believe they should have already been under hospital care by that time. This can be a deadly disease for many, especially those with compromised immune systems.

And during this past week, we learned another new term or the re-emergence of a term; “social distancing”.

From an article in Time magazine's March 11th edition, “Per the CDC's recommendation, social distancing involves ‘remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining distance’ whenever possible to limit the ability of the virus to spread.

“Social distancing is not the same as self-quarantine or isolation, two other practices being utilized to minimize the coronavirus spread. The key difference is that a quarantine or isolation restricts the movement of people within a certain area or zone to limit transferring and spreading an infection.”

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention described social distancing as staying away from mass gatherings and keeping a distance of 6 feet or about one body length away from other people.”

According to Web3US on the internet (and all citings are in the printed copy of this sermon), “Social distancing measures aim to reduce the frequency of contact and increase physical distance between persons, thereby reducing the risks of person-to-person transmission.

“The first outcome would be to delay the timing of the peak of infections to buy time for preparations in the healthcare system, the second to reduce the

size of the epidemic peak so that the healthcare system is not overwhelmed, and the third to spread infections over a longer time period, enabling better management of those cases and the potential for vaccines to be used at least later in the epidemic to reduce impact.”

<https://www.web3us.com/non-technical/social-distancing-what-are-benefits-how>

Many churches immediately changed the way members share the Peace by saying you can shake someone’s hand or not, you can hug someone or not; whatever you mutually feel comfortable with.

Changes were made as to how some celebrate Holy Communion, taking extra precautions to ensure fingers aren’t touching the wine during intinction or that pastors and communion assistants are wearing gloves, and so forth.

Each day brought new statistics, new warnings, and increased anxiety and often fear.

Thursday evening at 11:00pm, Governor Whitmer closed all the schools in the State of Michigan beginning tomorrow and continuing until Monday, April 6th. While those of us who may not have children or grandchildren in the school system may not feel directly affected, this has caused a huge problem. I’m not saying that her decision wasn’t warranted, but there was no notice to the school districts.

Luce County, which includes most of those who attend Our Redeemer and First Presbyterian, is the second poorest county in Michigan, according to the 2010 Census. Maybe that statistic will change after the census this year.

Chippewa County, which is where most of the members who attend Faith in the Soo, ranks 53rd on the poorest county list out of 83 counties.

Closing schools has created a huge negative impact on our most vulnerable members of society – our children, who receive free breakfast and free lunch five days a week during school. Many of them depend on the meals they get at school because of the limited amount of resources in their homes.

This past Friday at noon, there was an emergency Newberry Area Ministerial Association meeting to come up with a plan on how we, representing the spiritual community and the presence of Christ, can help. We had pastors of

many denominations, including the ELCA, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Assembly of God, the United Methodist Church, a pastor from the Bible church, and a representative from one of the Community churches.

Key partners who participated in the meeting included the Tahquamenon Area School Superintendent, a representative from the Department of Health and Human Services, representatives from the hospital, Community Action and the LINK. We had also received an email from the county's emergency preparedness committee with information for our meeting.

Our main focus was feeding our community kids.

With the help of all these partnerships, we developed a plan to get non-perishable food to the households. The school will take the lead as they work directly with the students and parents. The ministerial association will provide vouchers that can be used at either local grocery store to provide dairy, meat, fruit or vegetables to supplement meals. The other agencies have resources ready to help as well.

Yesterday the school superintendent sent an email stating that she has received some clarification of what the school can do which is they "can serve breakfast and lunch to any child under the age of 18 even if not a student of TAS."

Even though there are still details to work out and yesterday many of us in that group were still updating and exchanging emails, I feel a small sense of relief that no child will go hungry during this school shutdown.

I have a group email that includes the Church Councils from Our Redeemer Lutheran and Faith Lutheran, and the Session from First Presbyterian. I update it as often as I can, often more than once a day.

I noted that I will be in the Soo on Tuesday afternoon and asked their Council to see if there are ways Faith could be helping out that community. Not living in the Soo or having constant connections, it is difficult for me to determine the level of help needed.

So here we are today – some in person at Our Redeemer – and hopefully some hearing this on the websites or Facebook or reading my sermon.

And I ask the question: How does this relate to our really long gospel? Is there a connection? Maybe you've already answered that question and have come up with an answer.

In our gospel reading for today from John 4, Jesus was away from His disciples and in a Samaritan city called Sychar, at Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman approached the well to draw water and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

I'm not going to go through the long gospel again as we just heard it.

Here are some key points I would like to have you think about for a moment:

1. The woman who came to the well was an outcast. This is first evident by her actions. She came to the well at noon during the heat of the day. Most women came in the early morning hours when the sun was still rising, it wasn't so hot, and their energy level was still high. Yet, this Samaritan woman knew no one else would or should be there at that time of day.

2. The woman who came to the well had a bad reputation. She had been married five times and was living with a man who wasn't her husband. She was detested and disliked for these actions.

3. The woman who came to the well committed a huge social no-no. Her first mistake was talking to Jesus. You see, He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan, a race of people that the Jews utterly despised as having no claim on their God. Her second mistake was because it was improper for her, a single woman, to publicly have conversation with a man who was not her husband.

And yet, despite her reputation, her sins, her low place in society, Jesus struck up a conversation with her. "Give me a drink," Jesus said.

"How is it that you, a Jew, asks a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" she asked.

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."

He further goes on to say, "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.” I will give water that “will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

“Sir,” the woman responded, “Give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Jesus then proclaims to her that He is the Messiah.

This is such a powerful story. Jesus offers this woman the living water of grace. Her sins were washed away. Her soul was cleansed.

This encounter was a life-changing experience for the Samaritan woman. She left her water jug and went back to the city. She told people who she had met. She gave witness to the Messiah.

Understand this, prior to her meeting Jesus, she would have never had the courage to go back to the city and talk with people! No one in their right mind would have been caught socializing with this woman.

And our gospel reading says, “Many Samaritans from that city believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’”

They believed in Jesus, a Jew. Imagine that! Jesus’ ministering to the Samaritans, the outcasts of the Jewish society, reveals that all people are valuable to God and that Jesus encourages us and invites us to demonstrate love to everyone, including our enemies.

In that encounter, brief as it may have been, Jesus connected with her, this social outcast; the one who was isolated from her community. The one forced to practice social distancing – even on a much larger scale than what we are facing.

And through that connection, Jesus forgives her sins, and gives her courage and strength. He sends her back into the community in a totally new way.

It is my hope and prayer that we, too, after this “social distancing” that we must endure at this time, are sent back into our communities in a totally new way.

May we, too, celebrate this life-giving water Christ offers to us! And may we too, like the woman at the well, bring other to believe, through our words and our actions, that Jesus IS the Messiah, the Son of God. Thanks be to God!

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Let us pray...

Creator God, we thank You for the blessings of this day. We thank you for the times we are able to gather as your beloved in community. We treasure your presence with us in word and meal, song and prayer. Be with us in these days when gathering together as often as we would like is not possible. When we must be apart for reasons of safety, we trust that you surround us with your sheltering wings. Encourage us in connecting as we are able, reaching out to our neighbors in need and being persistent in prayer. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our constant companion. **Amen.**

Our Lord's Prayer

If you are reading this Sermon, I invite you to join in Our Lord's Prayer...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

Amen

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to serve our Lord! Thanks be to God!