

Sermon & Liturgy for 3/15/2020

Rev. Dr. Scott M. Kenefake

Welcome & Announcements

Opening Sentences

There is a time for everything in creation:
a time for light and a time for darkness,
a time for sound and a time for silence,
a time for action and a time for reflection,
a time for others and a time for oneself.
But all these times are God's time
and now is the time to be aware.

Let us pray:

Eternal God, we offer thanks and praise
for the opportunities we have
to celebrate your present-ness in life this day.

May we be surrounded with a very real sense of this present-ness
as we spend this time together.

May it be so. Amen.

John 4: 5-7, 9-15, 19-26, 39-42. (*Inclusive Text*)

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to
his son Joseph.

Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey,
sat straight down by the well.

It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her,
Give me a drink.'

The Samaritan woman said to Jesus,
'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?'

Jesus replied:

'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you:
Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask,
and he would have given you living water.'

'You have no bucket', she answered 'and the well is deep:
how could you get this living water?

Are you greater than our ancestors Leah, Rachel and Jacob
who gave us this well and drank from it
with their descendants and flocks?'

Jesus replied:

'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again;
but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again:
the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside,
welling up to eternal life.'

The woman said,

'Give me some of that water, so that I may never get
and never have to come here again to draw water...'

'I see you are a prophet.' said the woman.

'Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain,
while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.'

Jesus said:

'Believe me, woman; the hour is coming when you will worship God
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

'You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know;
for salvation comes from the Jews.

But the hour will come - in fact it is here already - when
true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth:
that is the kind of worshipper our God wants.

'God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.'

The woman said to Jesus,

'I know the Messiah is coming - the Anointed One – who will tell us everything.'

'I who am speaking to you,' said Jesus 'I am that one.'

Many Samaritans of the town had believed in Jesus on the strength of the woman's testimony when she said, 'He told me all I have ever done,' so when the Samaritans came up to Jesus, they begged him to stay with them.

Jesus stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard this one ourselves who we know really is the savior of the world.'

Message *"Thirsty for Life"*

David Lyle, a Lutheran Pastor in Chicago, recently said:

"I have been reading the first Harry Potter book to my daughter at bedtime. It had been a while since I'd read of young Harry's entry into the wizarding world, and many fond memories have bubbled up to the surface. As we got deeper into the book, however, something began to bother her. Before Hermione emerges as a main character, she's just Harry's classmate and a bit of a know-it-all—and she got on my daughter's nerves.

"So it was with great delight that we reached the end of chapter 10. After a harrowing encounter with a troll, we see the effect upon Hermione, Harry, and Ron:

There was a very embarrassed pause. Then, none of them looking at each other, they all said "Thanks," and hurried off to get plates. But from that moment on, Hermione Granger became their friend. There are some things you can't share without ending up liking each other, and knocking out a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them.

"My daughter," said Lyle, "thrilled in the moment, and so did I. I'm so familiar with the whole Harry Potter universe that I had forgotten that there was a time before Hermione knew Harry and Ron would be her friends. She was alone, an

outsider, and she had no reason to believe this would change. And then it did change.”¹

The scene that plays out in John 4 has a similar effect upon readers. We know the full arc of Jesus’ story. We know that he came for all people, with preferential treatment for those alone on the margins. But there was a time before the lonely and the marginalized had any way of knowing this. There was a time before you and I knew it, too.

John’s narrative drives us back to this point in the story. The unnamed woman comes to the well with no reason to expect anything in her life to change. As a Samaritan, a woman, and a person who has been (metaphorically) married multiple times, she has at least three reasons not to hope that Jesus might have anything to offer her.

First, Jesus shows her that God is up to something new. The encounter begins with what may seem an ordinary request. Jesus asks her for a drink. She sees this for what it is, however, a transgression of boundaries. When she demurs, Jesus seizes the opportunity to speak of a different kind of water, one that slakes every thirst and gushes up eternal life for all who drink of it.

Second, Jesus pushes the conversation ahead, speaking of a time when the rifts between God’s people will be healed, when true worship will be centered neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. They, and by implication all people, will worship together in spirit and truth. The woman has some inkling of where he’s headed. She too has been waiting for the Messiah. It is in this moment that the plot turns, and with it the entire arc of history: *“I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”*

And third, from this moment on, the woman’s story changes. Her life shifts, claimed now for the kingdom that Jesus has come to enact. She was an outsider, but no longer. She was alone; now she is part of the family of God, gifted and welcomed with living water. In this encounter, John invites us to forget for a moment that we know the rest of the story. Instead, we stand unknowing alongside this woman, thrilling in this moment of a once-forgotten person hearing that she is loved and valued—that the Messiah has not only come, but has come *for her*.

¹ David R. Lyle, Commentary on John 4:5-42, *The Christian Century*, February 17, 2017

As we delight in this moment, we are called anew to the work entrusted to us by Jesus. For one thing, we are reminded not to react like the disciples. John, as narrator, gives voice to their unspoken thoughts: “Why are you speaking with her?” Too often these thoughts roll through our minds. Yes, Jesus, we know you love all people, but surely you don’t mean people like that!

There is a deeper calling here, however, one that pierces our preconceived notions of God’s love and our misremembering of the story. It moves beyond theories and theologies of the gospel and reminds us that the love of God in Christ Jesus is for all people, especially those who have yet to hear these saving words of Jesus, a Messiah for all people.

There are still people at the well in the midday heat, those written off by society, looking in from the outside. The gospel drives us toward them with a word of hope that transcends race, gender, nationality, marital status, and anything else the world would use to separate us. In Christ, all such division is transcended and healed. We are sent to those who yearn to have their long thirst satisfied.

In other words, the story many of us know so well is the very thing that so many are yearning to hear. The people of God are called to welcome others to these life-giving baptismal waters. As we do, we will delight in their joy as they learn that they are not alone. They are loved, by God and by us. After all, there are some things you can’t share without ending up liking each other, and this is never more true than when we share the gushing, God-given water of life. *Amen.*

Pastoral Prayer (by Herb Nelson, Stated Clerk of the GA of the PCUSA)

Preface: As the novel coronavirus has captured the headlines in recent weeks, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and fear of the unknown have raised anxiety and caused widespread apprehension. Financial markets have wobbled and people of Asian descent in this country and around the world have been unfairly targeted. This virus has exposed the vulnerability and fragility of the global community.

As we all struggle with the horrific impact of the deadly virus that has infected so many people in China and now in a number of other countries, we cannot but call upon our God for help and healing.

Prayer: Please join me in crying out for relief from this plague.

We pray for healing for those who are infected, in China and in all the places where the virus has spread.

We pray for all who already have lost loved ones to the illness and those who will yet suffer such loss.

We pray for doctors, nurses and aides providing medical care, for insight in their caring, and for their health and well-being.

We pray for wisdom for the medical and scientific experts who are desperately seeking ways to control the spread of the virus.

We pray for public officials who must make the hard decisions about the quarantining of those who may have been exposed to the virus; and we pray for all those for whom those decisions feel like unjust imprisonment.

We lift up the Christian church in China and our partners throughout the region as they seek to bring Christ's healing presence and peace.

We pray for God to keep us alert to the threats posed by such a worldwide crisis, remembering the millions of God's children who live in places where the availability of medical care is meager or nonexistent.

May God open our hearts, our financial resources, and our political will, so that the vision of a better future can become a reality for all of God's children.

In the Providence of the God who created us, in the Passion of our Savior Jesus Christ who redeems us, and in the Power of the Holy Spirit through whom God's will is done.

The Lord's Prayer

Charge & Benediction

Let us go now, to *meet* all thirsting for God.

Let us go now, to *listen* as Jesus does with us.

Let us go now, to *bring* the Spirit's wholeness to others.

The grace ...

