

Sermons at Christ Church

Building Relationships through Love.

Lent III

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Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water,” the Samaritan woman said to Jesus. Today’s gospel reading draws a huge contrast with the reading from last week. Here are some notable contrasts, Nicodemus, a man, goes to Jesus in the middle of the night, with a nagging question. In today’s gospel, a nameless woman meets Jesus by the well of Jacob, in the middle of the day.

The man, Nicodemus, a Jew but the nameless woman was a Samaritan. Nicodemus was a teacher, but the Samaritan woman was a commoner. A moral religious leader and a supposedly immoral who had had five husbands. An educated Pharisee and an uneducated Samaritan. A respected religious leader and disrespected woman. The contrast between Nicodemus and the woman are like night and day, just like the time of day that both interacted with Jesus. It wasn’t surprising therefore that

But there are two remarkable similarities between the two of them, first, both of them showed a lack of understanding of what Jesus was saying to them. Second, both of them displayed a deep sense of their thirst, their hunger and their yearning for something new, something different. It was a deep recognition that they didn’t particularly appreciate where they were in life and that there was a need for growth.

The story of both Nicodemus and the Samaritan women point to the fact that it doesn’t really matter who you are or where you are in life, we all experience deep thirst, deep yearn, deep hunger and there is absolutely nothing that can satisfy that hunger, thirst and yearn than the fullness that comes from God alone. The fact that we are not even willing to accept that we are thirsty, hungry and yearn, is in itself a clear indication that we truly are a work in progress.

In the wilderness, the people of Israel didn’t hide their thirst. They complained to Moses when they were thirsty-and God came through for them with water that quenched their thirst. This is a stark reminder that it is only God who quenches our thirst. But we don’t need to be thirsty in the

wilderness. We don't need to be in a precarious situation before we express our need for God or to seek God's face. Our disposition must always be one of knowing that it is God who gives us not water from the well, but living water, and so long as we remain faithful, we shall never thirst, hunger or yearn because God is our fullness. And even when life feels like being in the wilderness, it is only our faith in God that proves resilient.

As the Samaritan woman demonstrates to us, no water from any well, whether we inherited it from our ancestor Jacob, or it is a neighbor's well, the water from the well cannot satisfy human longing. Rather, it makes us believe that so long as we can draw the water by ourselves, we don't need the living water. It is this false mindset that makes us believe that so long as we can draw water from the well by ourselves, we can rely on ourselves.

But what we hear Paul say to the church in Rome about the justification of faith reminds us that when we commit ourselves to faith, we abandon the heresy of control, we abandon any falsehood that convinces us that we can depend on ourselves. We hear Paul sharing with the church that there is no way that humans like you and me can satisfy our thirst, hunger or yearning by drawing on the water from the well by ourselves alone. In fact we don't need the water from the well, we need the living water which guarantees us the fullness of God.

Great are the works that we do, and God never disapproves of our desire to work, to right the wrongs that we notice around us and in our own lives. But it is our faith that makes all the difference because it is our faith that always reminds us of who it is that provides that living water. If we believe that it is God who provides the living water, then it is God who awakens in us the possibilities of new life in Christ. It is God who invites us to God's feast.

The Samaritan woman had always been to the well to draw water, and so being at the well that afternoon wasn't new for her. What became new for her was meeting a Jewish man who revealed to her that there is some living water that God freely gives to God's people-that water doesn't come at any cost and that anyone who is thirsty can come and drink of that water. And the moment you drink that water you don't go back and drink water from the well. In other words, you wouldn't drink from your own strength but from the fullness of God.

Jesus' words to the woman created a new evangelist. We therefore see in the story not only a woman who prized the new life that had been revealed to her, but so many other people who knew her, and

who now see something that is so attractive in her, created within them a desire to receive what the Samaritan woman had received.

The beauty of this story is that it shows how Jesus persists with us until we see the truth, until we grow. And our growth becomes magnetic because it is the kind of growth that attracts. The attraction becomes like a revival-the awakening that reminds us that God is still interested in us. That since the days that our ancestors clamored for water in the wilderness, God is still interested in us. That since the days that those ancestors rejected God because of a lack, God is still interested in us. That since the days when the Christians in Rome thought that their works of mercy was the only pathway to God, God is still interested in us. God is interested in us because God understands that we are all a work in progress. And there is no better time than Lent to remind ourselves that God is still interested in us because we are all a work in progress-we are poised for growth.

And the fact that we grumble in the wilderness and reject God doesn't mean that our lives cannot experience a turnaround or God is no longer interested in us.

Listen to George Herbert's Love Bade Me Welcome:

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.*

*A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?*

*Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.*

***You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.***

The question is, do you know the one who bore the blame? If there is one person who deserves our gratitude, it is our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we experience fullness of God. And his invitation to the Samaritan woman and to us has never been about proving ourselves, it has always been about sitting at the table with him-listening and learning so we can grow.

Lent is about growth, and part of our growth is admitting that we are indeed thirsty, hungry and yearn to be fulfilled by God. Lent is about being a better version of ourselves. It is the recognition that we are not where we need to be. But with God, the God that is interested in us, we can be where we need to be-and that is the power of growth that underlies the Christian message.

I heard about a captain whose ship was sinking at sea because of a storm. He then called out *“Anyone here knows how to pray?”* A pastor stepped forward. *“Captain, I know how to pray.”* *“Good,”* said the captain, *“you pray while the rest of us put on our life jackets – we’re one jacket short.”*

You and I live in a society consumed not by the living water that offers eternal life, but by the water from the well. But we all know that the water from the well does not guarantee us anything but the temporal pleasure of control, mischief, corruption, greed and pride.

Famed Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky once wrote that **“Pain and suffering are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart. The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for. Power is given to only those who dare to lower themselves and pick it up. Only one thing matters, one thing, to be able to dare.”** This morning, the invitation is to dare to have something to live for, dare to grow, dare to embrace the fullness of God, dare to be the person you can be for God is still interested in you. **Amen.**