

Lent 3, 3.15.2020

St. Mark's, Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Genesis 12:1-4a; 3:1-7; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

“Living Water”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

All of us need water. Water is essential for all living things, but imagine if water was hard to come by, or if one's water source had become contaminated. Nothing can really take the place of water. This simple but profound realization came to me a number of years ago when we were missionaries in Japan during the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear plant meltdown. A severe level of radiation from the Fukushima nuclear plant exposed the surrounding Tohoku region, north of Tokyo, to contamination. Tokyo's drinking water flows from rivers that originate in this region of Japan, and agriculture, livestock and rivers became either contaminated or suspected of being contaminated.

In an instant, bottled water disappeared from the shelves of stores. The fear and anxiety about an unknown future drove people to begin to hoard daily essentials. I thought about my past experience in that time of severe crisis recently as I watched people begin to buy large amounts of bottled water and other daily essentials. We also live in a time of severe anxiety and fear about the future. Fears over the spread of a virus, not dissimilar to fears of radiation contamination, make us fearful of something that we cannot easily see. We may feel as if things are slowly getting out of control. Yet, this moment also offers us an opportunity to ask our selves, “What is the most important resource in my life?” “What is just as important to me as water?”

The gospel reading for today is the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. A Samaritan woman came to a well to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “*Give me a drink.*” The woman was surprised because Jesus had spoken to a Samaritan. In spite of their religious closeness, Jews and Samaritans did not share an easy or cordial relationship. In answer to her surprise, Jesus said, “*If you knew who it was that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.*”

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that we will become thirsty again with normal water, but with the water that he gives, they will never be thirsty. “*The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.*” The Samaritan woman wisely said, “*Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.*”

In times of anxiety and crisis, we thirst not only for water and life's essential things, but also for signs of God's presence in our landscape that suddenly seems have become parched and barren. We may long for the reassurance of God's presence - a presence that renews us and helps us grow so that we can continue to love and live for others. In such times we desperately need the living water that Jesus offered to the Samaritan woman at the well.

Much of the dispute between Samaritans and Jews was over the location of the proper and holy place to worship. Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim, while Jews worshiped in Jerusalem. Jesus told this woman that the time was coming when people would not worship on a particular mountain or in a particular place: "*The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.*"

We live in extraordinary times. We face a virus that has traveled the world, and knows no borders. Human frailty and fear leads to economic, political and social upheaval. In the whirlwind of these upheavals we find ourselves temporarily unable to gather for worship in our holy place of sanctuary. In times of testing, we long for God's presence and the reassurance of Christ's body that we experience at St. Mark's.

Jesus' words encourage us to realize that we have always worshiped God in spirit and truth, and that we can continue to worship God in spirit and truth wherever we are. We can still remember our sisters and brothers in the spirit and truth of prayer. We can still remember the concerns of the world in the spirit and truth of prayer. We can still bring our innermost fears and anxiety to Jesus, the wellspring of eternal life and hope.

For the coming weeks, on Sunday no matter where we are, let us take time to remember one another in prayer. Let us gather around the living Word that is Jesus the Christ. Let us remember as we walk the Lenten way of the cross, we are walking toward the resurrection. This time of testing is also an opportunity for us to draw deeply from the source of living water.

Jesus himself is the living water that will satisfy and bless us as we walk through upheavals, barrenness, and uncertainty. The woman who met Jesus at the well went away a changed person. As she talked about Jesus, she shared living water with others. Those who heard her came to believe and said, "*We know that this is truly the savior of the world.*" Draw from these living waters. Christ will restore you to live anew for today. Amen