



Sunday, March 15, 2020
The Third Sunday in Lent

Rev. Jeffrey D. Hall, Senior Pastor
First United Methodist Church
San Jose, CA.

Centering Thought

A Woman of no Distinction

I am a woman of no distinction
of little importance.
I am a woman of no reputation
save that which is bad.

You whisper as I pass by and cast judgmental glances,
Though you don't really take the time to look at me,
Or even get to know me.

For to be known is to be loved,
And to be loved is to be known.
Otherwise what's the point in doing
either one of them in the first place?

I want to be known.

by Chris Kinsley & Drew Francis 2007

Prayer

Loving God, I come to you this day and bring my whole self to this holy moment. I entrust my hidden, fearful, and fragile self to your transforming power and loving care. Blessing, glory, and honor are yours alone. Thank you for the many ways your Spirit flows into my life and into this troubled world. I offer this prayer in the name of the One who is Grace and Truth, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Sacred Scripture

John 4:5-42

So he 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.”

Pastoral Reflection

Terry Hershey tells this story. During the Iraq War, a five-year-old boy watches the news with his father. The boy keeps asking, “How big is this war? How did it start? What is war? Why are so many families, on the TV, so sad?” The father tries to explain why countries go to war, why some people think wars are necessary, and other people believe that wars are wrong. But the boy keeps asking the same questions, night after night.

Finally, the father listens. And hears the real question.

He holds his son tight and says to him, “You don’t have to worry. We are safe here. Dad will keep you safe. And our family will be safe, and we will do whatever we can to help keep other families

safe.” After his Dad spoke, the boy became peaceful, because it was the reassurance his heart had been asking for.

Perhaps you, too, need some reassurance today? I know I do. I suspect for most of us our lives are complicated and difficult enough, never mind the added anxiety and fear that accompanies the threat of a pandemic like the Coronavirus. The regular rhythm of my life was disrupted this week. Jennifer and I went out to dinner and about halfway through the meal I thought to myself: “Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.” When you go to Costco to do your shopping only to discover one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse road off with all the toilet paper, you can feel like just maybe the whole world *is* about to end. Appointments cancelled, large Board meetings rescheduled, churches closed on Sunday, and a news cycle that seems more interested in ascribing blame on this race, or that country, or this president then reporting information that will actually help the public make the safest and most responsible decisions during these difficult times.

For roughly 173 years, followers of Jesus have come to SJ First to pray, sing, and break bread together in the context of Christian community during anxious and fearful times. During worship, we have received the grace of forgiveness, strength for the journey, acceptance of a community whose ties are blessed and bound together by love, and the reassurance that we are not alone. God is with us.

There has been a lot of good and necessary advice concerning “social distancing” lately, and it got me thinking about the Samaritan woman in our gospel passage today. She was expected to keep a social distance for other reasons, but no less distant and isolating.

While the men were politicking in the marketplace, and the supposedly respectable woman were just coming back from brunch with their girlfriends. Or Pilates class. Or Yoga. Or whatever the upstanding women of that village did around noon in the first century. One woman – who was not a member of the Parent Teacher Association; who was not a member of the local book club; who was not invited to the UMW Tea since her first husband perhaps died, the second husband divorced, and the third, fourth, and fifth husband? Well, the town can’t seem to get the story straight – this Samaritan woman, who was likely feeling very alone and isolated, met Jesus at the well.

In her book, *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown writes: “Last week, while I was trying to enjoy my manicure, I watched in horror as the two women across from me talked on their phones the entire time they were getting their nails done. They employed head nods, eyebrow raises, and finger-pointing to instruct the manicurists on things like nail length and polish choices. I really couldn’t believe it. I’ve had my nails done by the same two women for ten years. I know their names (their real Vietnamese names), their children’s names, and many of their stories. They know my name, my children’s names, and many of my stories. When I finally made a comment about the women on their cell phones, they both quickly averted their eyes. Finally, in a whisper, the manicurist said, “They don’t know. Most of them don’t think of us as people.”

Jesus sees this Samaritan woman as fully human, beloved by God. A conversation follows. One that’s worth reading again this week. He speaks with this unnamed woman longer than any other person recorded in the scriptures as we have them today. It’s intimate, honest, and vulnerable. By the end of it, he knows who she is, and she knows who he is. He knows he loves her – always has.

And she knows he loves her, and that is enough. There, at the well, she receives the reassurance she needs – the reassurance her heart had been asking for. She is not alone. God is with her in the person of Jesus. She is known and loved.

This week take time at noon every day to visit The Well in prayer and holy imagination. The well is where we go when we are tired and thirsty. The well is where we go to meet Jesus when we are anxious and afraid. The well is where we go to hear words of grace and truth. The well is where we go to drink the Living Water and never thirst again. The well is where we go when we feel isolated and alone. The well is where we go to be known and loved. The well is where we go when our hearts need to be reassured: We are not alone. God is with us.

Affirmation of Faith

Imagine you are gathered in a circle around The Well holding hands with your church family, members of your own family, friends, neighbors, strangers, and of course the Samaritan Woman and Jesus. As you say aloud this affirmation of faith, imagine we are all saying it with you.

**We are not alone, we live in God's world.
 We believe in God: who has created and is creating,
 who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
 to reconcile and make new,
 who works in us and others by the Spirit.
 We trust in God.
 We are called to be the church:
 to celebrate God's presence,
 to love and serve others,
 to seek justice and resist evil,
 to proclaim Jesus,
 crucified and risen,
 our judge and our hope.
 In life, in death, in life beyond death,
 God is with us.
 We are not alone.
 Thanks be to God.
 Amen.**

The Blessing

Before you were born,
 God knew you.
 You are not an accident,
 although those will occur
 And you are not a mistake,
 although you and I will make them.
 You are fearfully and wonderfully made,
 Beloved and blessed by God.

Go now out into the world and offer it your blessing.
Go knowing no matter where you go,
Or where I go,
All the ground between and before us
Is Holy Ground.
Go now in Peace.
Amen.

Please let Pastor Gerardo and I know of anyone who might be feeling especially isolated during this time so we can contact them and offer pastoral support and prayer.

revjeffumc@mac.com

gerardov@sanjosefirst.org