

John 4:5-42

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Samantha Evans

March 15, 2020

We Are the Woman

Well good morning, my friends, and welcome to this strange, yet grace-filled time of worship. It is bizarre to be here in this space without all of you. And it also fills me with deep gratitude to know that though virtual, we can remain connected in a time when the kindest, most faithful action we can take is “social-distancing.”

I am mindful of the many folx who do not have access to the internet or to community. Who are anxious about their jobs and their children. Who are at risk of severe illness. Who are feeling isolated and vulnerable. I am mindful of the anxiety and fear that many of us, myself included, are feeling. It is the fear of the unknown. Of what tomorrow may hold. Of how our lives will be shifted in this time of global pandemic.

I also am mindful of those who are feeling a deep lament for the state of our society. I myself am feeling super sad. This pandemic is horrific in its own right, and also it is highlighting, not even necessarily exacerbating, but really bringing to light the gross injustice which exists in our society. In our country. I am experiencing deep lament for the state of our society.

As I prepared this sermon, I wondered where, or even if, I would uncover the Good News in this time. I feel a great responsibility to all of you: to create a space for you to lament, to name your fears and anxiety, and to process your grief. And I also feel a deep desire to give you a sense of comfort and a sense of hope.

And I'll tell you that it took a while for me to get there, and even when I thought I was finally there, when I sat down to write, the words didn't come easily. And that is because I am unsure. And I don't want to try to lie to you, mostly because I'm a horrible liar, and I know y'all would see right through it. But also, because I believe it is of utmost importance that we are honest, measured, and extremely cautious.

It feels important to me to name that it has been and will continue to be difficult to remain rooted in the promises of God. To believe that everything is

going to be okay. Because I really don't have any way of knowing that. But like any faithful preacher, I turned to Scripture, praying to receive a Word, an authentic Word that might resonate deep within our beings. An authentic Word, which might give us all some sense of comfort and hope.

Now, I am going to share with you some insights I've received this week, which I count as gifts from God. For even in my uncertainty and my confusion, this encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well holds within it that authentic Word for which I prayed.

There's two parts to this very long text that I want to bring out. The first has to do with the living water, which Jesus tells this unnamed woman he possesses.

Scholars debate why she has been left unnamed. Most assert that it is to really drive home her "nobody status." But at least in this time, I feel that that her namelessness reveals her "everybody-ness." She is anybody and everybody. For we are all that woman at the well, in need of living water. In need of a savior who knows us, who sees us, who understands our needs, and who offers us a drink of living water.

Living water which becomes within us a spring of gushing water which never fails, but fills us up and quenches our thirst day after day after day.

We are in need of this living water.

It just feels so immensely important that we all take time to stop, to process, to grieve, to get creative, and to breathe. Because take it from me, my friends, when we are overflowing with anxiety and fear, we have got to take some time to release it, and in this time, we are going to have to get creative with how we make room to receive this living water.

One of the things I am mulling over is how to use social media to create and offer spaces for all of us to connect, to pray, to meditate, and to worship. So, in addition to Sunday morning worship services, I am hoping to offer guided meditations throughout the week.

I am not sure yet exactly what this is going to look like. But I met with my spiritual director on Friday, and I just cannot tell you how helpful and healing it was to just stop and take some time to feel what I am feeling, to make room

to mourn and grieve, and make room for to receive the living water and the comforting presence of the Spirit of God.

I will tell you that at some point in my session, I felt that unmistakable hope bubble up within me, that hope that only comes from God, and it is my desire and hope that I might create that same kind of space for all of you.

If that works for you, I hope you will tune in. And if that doesn't resonate with you, I would just encourage you to find something that works for you. If it's working out or doing yoga, give me a call and I can recommend some apps or YouTube videos.

If it's spending time with loved ones, but you can't at this time, then write letters, send cards, call one another, and if you have a computer or a smart phone, then use FaceTime or Skype or Zoom. And if you're having a hard time with that, then again, call me or Irene and we will walk you through it step-by-step.

Like the woman at the well, we are in need of living water. And when we can't get that water the way we usually do, by actually going out and meeting one another at the well, we must remember this doesn't mean that the water isn't still available, it just means we'll have to open ourselves in different ways so that we might receive it.

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There's one more gift in this story which I would like to bring out for y'all. You'll remember that this encounter began with Jesus asking this woman for a drink of water. They met at the well at 12 noon. It was certainly quite warm, and Jesus, being fully human, was in great need of an actual drink of water.

I think we tend to kind of skip right past this part, maybe seeing it simply as an opening line to set up Jesus and what he wants to offer this woman. But it feels so important in this time to take this at face value. And again, see ourselves as the woman at the well, being invited to give an actual drink of water, actual sustenance and help, to those who are in need.

This might look like folks who are less at-risk getting groceries or other supplies for those who cannot leave their homes. It might look like watching

one another's kids or helping one another make ends meet. It might be donating to shelters or food banks, folks who cannot stop offering the life-sustaining services they provide.

We know that Jesus comes to us as the stranger, asking us for a drink of water, actual sustenance. In a time when we are physically isolated, when the world tells us to hoard and to care only for ourselves, we have a responsibility to proclaim the good news to poor, the imprisoned, the isolated, that we are not alone.

That we are in this together and that we will do whatever we can to help one another, to alleviate suffering, and to "be" with one another, even though that's going to look differently for a while.

We may be physically isolated, but we are not alone. We are the unnamed woman at the well. Jesus is offering us living water, and inviting us to extend actual water to those in need.

And my friends, I invite y'all to respond just like this woman, with an almost juvenile joy, believing, against all odds, that when we are in deepest need of sustenance, of being seen and known and cared for, God will surely show up and offer us living water, which quenches our thirst and creates within us an overflowing, life-sustaining spring of water, which never fails.

I leave you with these words from the prophet Isaiah:

*The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
(Isaiah 58:11)*

Thanks be to God. AMEN.