

Exodus 17:1-7

John 4:5-42

Romans 5:1-11

“Let us come into the presence of
the Lord with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise
to God with songs of praise!” AMEN!

What happens when we are stressed,
anxious, or afraid?

Most people, when faced with these stressors
will respond with aggression, run away,
shut-down, or people please.

That last one was unexpected for me to learn.

That’s the reaction of doing whatever possible
to make the other person happy
so that conflict is avoided.

It does not lead to healthy boundaries.

Most of the time, when we give in
to the common automatic responses
to fear, danger, and stress is:

Fight, Flight, Freeze, or Fawn, we learn
how these immediate responses
protect us in the short-term,

sometimes life calls for them to be used,
but far too often we default to them when
we could have paused, taken a breath,
prayed and waited -
before taking immediate reaction.

When we can do these things
we will find that fewer rash decisions are made,
damaged relationships are avoided, and
regret passes away. (Pause)

Each of our lessons today have
something to do with human response.

In Exodus we read an account about
the Israelites in the wilderness.

They were terribly thirsty.

Afraid of what would come next,
they cried out to Moses.

Why would you bring us out of Egypt
to die of thirst in the wilderness?

They chose to fight with Moses (and God)
in the midst of their fear.

Who can blame them?

They'd witnessed miraculous things that
brought them out of Egypt and rescued them
from Pharaoh.

Did all those things occur just so
they'd die in the desert? (Pause)

Then in the Romans reading we find Paul's
teaching on the purpose of suffering.

Paul articulates for us Kelly Clarkson's song
titled "Stronger" -

"What Doesn't Kill You makes you stronger
Stand a little taller."

The song is undeniably catchy
while it's lyrics encapsulate Frederick Nietzsche's
saying suggesting that

sufferings and hardships are integral
to personal development.

They build opportunities to cultivate courage,
resilience, and wisdom.

Verse 4 of Romans Chapter 5,
has been misused and cast upon

people in the midst of suffering.

I don't recommend communicating this teaching
to anyone that is in the midst of suffering,
but when one looks back at periods of

trouble and trial, one might see that
the experiences did produce endurance,
character was built or cultivated, and
inevitably that produced hope
to/for us.

This is why awake and aware people
respond to danger and fear in wiser ways. (Pause)

To think of the experiences of being afraid,
the accounts of anxiety, and the
stresses of survival endured by the woman
at the well makes her encounter

with Jesus all the more meaningful.

She was ostracized from her community.

Forced to draw her water at the hottest part of the day,
in order to avoid shameful glances and whispers,

but in the midst of her suffering
there was Jesus to abide with her. (Pause)

Last week, we read about Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night and being confused by Jesus' teaching about being born again/anew.

Today, we find an unnamed woman, a foreigner, who came to the well in the middle of the day to find Jesus already there.

Like Nicodemus, she was confused by Jesus' teachings, too.

What is this Living Water you offer?

"You don't even have a bucket!" (Men!)

But, the difference with the woman is that while she didn't understand Jesus' teaching,

she seized the opportunity to question a prophet about practicing worship and the ways God comes into the world.

In very concrete ways, she herself is a theologian and an evangelist as she tells people about Jesus and God's presence.

Instead of fighting, fleeing, shutting down,

or even people pleasing the woman at
the well paused, took a breath, and
continued to ask Jesus to clarify
his words.

Her ability to withstand automatic
human responses makes her life become one
not crushed by shame, but the model
for discipleship and telling people
about how God came to her. (Pause)

There's a wonderful true story about
the ways praise and prayer positively change
the ways we respond to danger and fear.

“During the Second World War,
a young woman named Corrie ten Boom
lived with her family in the Netherlands.

They were devoted Christians who
hid Jewish people in their home
to protect them from Nazi persecution.

One night, the Gestapo raided their home.

As soldiers pounded on their door,
fear washed over Corrie -

she was terrified for her family and for

those they were hiding.

In that paralyzing moment, instead of panicking,
her father quietly prayed aloud, thanking God
for God's sovereignty and
presence even in danger.

Corrie joined in, whispering Psalms of praise,
like the one we chanted today.

“O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!”

The brief act of worship didn't make the fear vanish,
but the pause transformed their reaction to it.

Instead of chaos in fighting, running or
shutting down there was calm determination.

They were arrested, yes - but their courage and
peace inspired others to do what
they were doing and take action.

Corrie later wrote that “Praising God in fear
gives fear its right size - [a size much] smaller
than God.” (Pause)

This is the living water that Jesus gives.

I find it fascinating that when the disciples
returned to Jesus the woman left quickly,
so quickly that she'd left her water jar.

It's affirmation for us that sometimes decisions
need too be made in haste, yet her walk back
to her community gave her
the quiet contemplation needed.

The pause and the prayer to consider everything
that happened in her encounter with Jesus.

If you listen closely you can almost hear Jesus
say to his disciples,

“See that woman, do what she's doing.”

AMEN!