

March 15, 2020
St. Mark Lutheran Church
Pastor Katy Fast
John 4:5-42

5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9 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.) 10 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." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 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." 15 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." 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 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. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 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." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." 27 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?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" 30 They left the city and were on their way to him. 31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the

disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35 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. 36 The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." 39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 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."

"Stay with us, Jesus."

We are in uncharted waters here, dear people. This week I was writing my sermon while brainstorming contingency plans and checking health departments websites. How shall we, as the body of Christ, maintain our connections together while finding ways to bring people into repentance, forgiveness, praise, solidarity, lament, generosity, and encounters with the word of God? (A tall order!) How can we care for the shut-ins? How will we feed those with little or no food? Will we be able to continue feeding ministries that are certainly more important than ever? Sarah's Tent canceled their hot community meal this past week and decided to hand out sack lunches instead. Our children who receive Pack-A-Sack lunches regularly, how will they be fed over the extra week of school closing? How will we as human beings care for the least of these, be patient with one

another, be hopeful, and NOT give in to fear over the spread of COVID-19...

Because let's face it - some folks are panicking too much. When you've stocked up on a year's worth of toilet paper already... I think you've panicked too much.

Others think they know more than the public-health experts. But we really need to be listening to science and public health leaders and follow the precautions they've outlined to help, not only for ourselves, but for the most vulnerable in our population.

And you know, lots of folks, most all of us really, are simply trying to do our best to keep ourselves and our neighbors safe. We are washing our hands long enough to say the Lord's Prayer or (if you're at my house) sing your ABC's. We are calling or texting to check on friends, neighbors and relatives to see how they are, if they are healthy. We are practicing some physical "distancing" right now so that we can slow the spread of the virus and prayerfully, intentionally, lessen it's impact. That is why, after today, St. Mark is suspending services and all church activities and meetings for the remainder of March.

I do though draw pause...I take caution...that in our attempts to decrease the spread of the disease, we don't isolate those who need love and connection the most. Jim Boyter, our property steward, shared that his son, Steve, who lives in a nursing home up in New Port Richey, is no longer able to receive visitors to his room. He's allowed to be wheeled outside in his wheelchair to visit, and then wheeled back in afterwards. So how could we, who won't see Steve for the foreseeable future, encourage him in our connection through Christ?

Hymn composer, Tom Trenney, writes this beautiful message in response to our experience of isolation and living into the "different."

"Music is not cancelled. It will just sound a little different for a while. Church is not cancelled. Worship will just look a little different for a while. Relationships will not be cancelled. They will just feel a little different for a while. Faith will not be cancelled. It will just grow in different ways for a while. Love will not be cancelled. In fact, we will need more of it for a while. Grace and peace be with you all as we find our way in this new wilderness."

This wilderness is certainly a new one. Uncharted one. But I promise, it is one we travel *TOGETHER*.

Now since there is no direct road map for this, and I certainly had no seminary class “Pandemic Ministry 101,” I’d like us to think about something for a moment. While we, church, are practicing physical distance from one another...*how might we be called by God to draw closer together communally? spiritually?* How can we care for one another meaningfully? How can we reach out to those who might feel alone and say – we are here for you... How can we continue to be the body of Christ without weekly receiving...the body of Christ, the blood of Christ...and without gathering in the same physical space together?

I’d really like to hear your answers to this question. No...I’m serious. I would. So, if you’re able, please e-mail me or leave me a voicemail and let me know what ideas you have for our church to stay connected as we go into this new experience in our life together. Take a moment and think about that now. If you’re listening to this at home, consider writing it down. *While we, as a church, are practicing physical distancing... how might we be called by God to draw closer together spiritually? communally?*

(Pause)

When I was young and I was sick, I always wanted by mom to care for me. Perhaps it's because she's a nurse and she always added that *extra* special touch to her care routine, or maybe it was because of the compassionate way she spoke with me and checked my feverish brow. Whatever it was, she was the one I called in the middle of the night when I didn't feel good.

I remember one time when I had the flu and she had done everything possible medically to help keep me comfortable and aid in the healing process, she asked: "Is there anything else I can get you?"

"Will you just stay with me, Mom?" I remember asking. I just wanted to know the comfort of her ministry of presence. I didn't need her to sing or entertain, or even say anything. Her presence with me, through this uncertain and terrible illness was what I longed for. And she stayed. We watched a Hallmark movie together, or Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman, I don't know. I forget THAT part. But I REMEMBER that she stayed.

The Samaritans in our story today make a similar request of Jesus. They come to Jesus and ask him to stay with them.

Now, usually when I read this story, my mind focuses on the Samaritan woman – on her direct conversation with Jesus (the LONGEST conversation Jesus has with anyone in the Bible). On the puzzle over what he means by “living water.” My mind goes to her epiphany that not only is this man welcoming of outsiders, he’s the Christ – he’s “I am”, God’s son, he’s the Savior of the world. My mind sees her running back to her town and having go-tell-it-on-the-mountain-like conversations with anyone who will listen.

That’s usually what I think of. But today’s different. Today, I hear the ones she runs back to asking her – well, how can WE also get this living water? How can WE talk with this compassionate man who knows and see us? How can WE know this joy and peace you feel?! We should ask him to stay with us! Like a friend saying “stay for dinner!” or a relative saying “stay one more night, it looks like bad weather for you to travel.”

These folks knew in their hearts that they had to see and meet this Jesus for themselves and they wanted him to STAY with them – like a nurse

ministers with presence to a patient. They yearned for his words and wisdom, for his incarnational heartbeat that called to them like the siren song of Frozen 2!

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Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in "The Book of Forgiving," says that "our suffering, our pain, and our losses have the power to transform us."

I think this is a time that can and will transform us, dear people, and let us call upon our Savior and friend to STAY WITH US throughout this uncertain time.

Stay with us, Jesus, at our bedsides and in our hospitals.

Stay with us, Jesus, in our cars, our boats, and on our planes.

Stay with us, Jesus, with our children and with our elderly, with the immunocompromised and the vulnerable.

Stay with us, Jesus, as we work and as we worry about losing work, and as we play.

Stay with us, Jesus, as we search for ways to safely and boldly care for our neighbor.

Jesus, help us remember that you are bigger than COVID-19. You are Savior and remind us "Do not fear." You call us to live boldly, and accept your grace even more boldly still.

And you know, after those two days that Jesus camped out with the Samaritans...they came to believe for themselves. They no longer needed the testimony they first heard. They had seen and lived it themselves. They knew in their hearts that this is the Savior of the world.

Our world is in need of saving. Global pandemic. We are talking about the whole world.

Our world's Savior is in our midst today, dear church. Wherever you are.

Whatever you are doing. Know it. Believe it.

Amen.