**March 15, 2020**

**John 4:5-42**

When Martin Luther was dealing with The Black Death plague, he wrote these wise words that can help inform the way we approach things happening in our world right now:

“I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me He will surely find me and I have done what He has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person I shall go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

People are thirsty. We are thirsty for news. This desire is fed by 24-hour news cycles, tickers streaming across the bottom of a broadcast – even a news broadcast which keeps a running “breaking!” news scrolling across the bottom of their screen; the news is even too slow for the news itself. Our desire for news about friends and family takes us to gossipy people and certain magazines and Facebook and other platforms that will tell us everything there is to know about someone and something. Because we are thirsty for news, however true or exaggerated it might be.

Maybe because there are so many stories floating around about us, we are thirsty to be known. *Really* known. It is human nature to be in relationship with one another, forming friendships and family groups, and making romantic and platonic connections with whom we share our deepest, most significant thoughts and emotions. In addition to letting others *know* us, nowadays we also visit therapists and take personality tests and do things which help us better know ourselves. The stereotypical midlife crisis is caused by not knowing who we really are, and wrestling with all of the pressures that formed us into what we became.

In that, people are thirsty for healing – physical, emotional, or spiritual – people are thirsty for wellness and wholeness. When there is disease in body, mind, or soul, we seek out professionals for treatment. Something to tame my upset stomach, something to calm my anxious mind, some peace to offer my broken spirit.

People are thirsty for revenge. When a perceived injustice occurs – however large or small – the immediate response is, “you’re gonna get it!” Usually, when we have this sort of thirst, we turn to authorities for help: we tell our parent or teacher that *they* kicked me. We hope for the police to arrest someone driving dangerously. We herd an impatient Costco shopper into the slowest check-out line.

… Relatedly, I went to Costco on Thursday morning to buy some bleach for the church… I planned to be there before the store actually opened so that I could be the first in the doors, grab what we needed, and slip home before the crowds arrived. Ha! At 9:55am, a line of people wrapped around the building while cars circled like vultures. Once the doors opened, people rushed forward with their carts and pushed to the back of the store where the toilet paper and paper towels were stacked. It was elbows-out the whole way. Those who moved easily, those who were taller or stronger or faster or just took up more room on the aisle largely ignored the other people also trying to get what they needed. I was rolled over and pushed aside a few times while I both tried to hold my own place and help someone in front of me. People frantically pulled cases of water into their cart. And when they reached the maximum of purchases allowed, they started looking for whatever else would do in a pinch – Flavored water? Grab it. Seltzer? Get it. Gatorade? Better buy it now before it’s gone. Granted, we are in the midst of a legitimate local and international crisis, but people aren’t actually thirsty *now*. (They weren’t actually thirsty for half of what they purchased.) As far as I know, there is no threat to our water supply. But shoppers shoved their way through to take what they might need when they *might* be thirsty one day.

Here in the Gospel, Jesus was actually tired and thirsty. He sat down by the well and asked the woman for something to drink. It’s not clear if he ever got his order, but it is clear that while *he* was in need, he ended up being the one who served. A woman who was thirsty for healing, a woman who was thirsty to be known, a woman whose life had seen many crises (the number of her husbands is a clue that some terrible things have happened to her) came up to the well. While she wasn’t there to see Jesus, she was obviously within conversation distance. He spoke up and reached out and mentioned that *she* could have asked *him* for a drink and he *could have* given her living water. Confused, she said, “you don’t even have a bucket!” And he replied, “Not *this* water! The water I give will become an internal spring, gushing within a person, giving them eternal life.” Still not sure what he was talking about, she said, “Well give it to me so I don’t have to come back here.” And eventually their conversation led to Jesus disclosing his true identity: the Messiah.

“In scripture, no two people encountered Jesus exactly the same way.” Not once did anyone pray the “Sinner’s Prayer” that many people are instructed to use today – magic words that lead a new believed to salvation. Never does anyone in scripture ask Jesus into their heart… Jesus had a different impact on different people. Salvation meant one thing to Mary Magdalene, the first to witness the resurrection, and whole ‘nother thing to the thief who died next to Jesus on a cross… There’s no formula, no blueprint, no set-in-stone way to salvation if you go by Jesus’ approach. [[2]](#footnote-2) Jesus met everyone as they were with what they needed, be that a question and a need himself, or an answer to someone else’s question, or an act of healing or simple kindness. Jesus’ presence adapted to the people he was with, just as water adapts to the ground over which it flows. Different types of rock and soil shape the way water flows. We see this when the Mississippi River floods miles across low, flat fields, as opposed to the Colorado River which carved the Grand Canyon from rock made of magma and lava. We know that water adapts to different surfaces when we watch it puddle on a plastic table cloth, or run across our skin. Living water changes its form and flow to meet whatever it touches.

For Jesus to be the living water, and for Jesus to be so adaptable in his meeting of us, for Jesus to be so flexible in the ways he carries people to salvation, that tells us that (*today*) some people will be baptized as infants, while others might be baptized as adults. Some people will worship God by raising their hands and shouting, “Hallelujah!” while others will worship God in silence with their heads down and hands together. It should tell us that rules might make sense most of the time, but not *all* of the time. Largely because we are the maker of the rules, but God is the Ruler of the Universe. God is the One who orders salvation. Christ is the One who meets us in the road.

This has definitely been a week when we had to throw out the rulebook. What might have worked on any other given week. Christ’s living water came in many different forms to a thirsty world this week: Italian neighborhoods singing across their balconies at night to boost morale after days of isolation[[3]](#footnote-3), the Seoul Korea orchestra performing free online concerts (in empty performance halls)[[4]](#footnote-4). In Oregon, a woman heard someone calling for help, then found an elderly couple parked in a grocery store lot. While they were medically fragile and unable to go inside and shop for themselves, they needed someone else to buy what they needed.[[5]](#footnote-5) So they gave this stranger a $100 bill and their shopping list, and she helped them. Even when it seemed they didn’t have helpers to call, helpers to deliver groceries, Christ’s living water came in the form of a willing stranger.

The world is *thirsty* for living water on any given day, but especially in these crazy days. Be on the lookout for ways that you can be Christ’s hands and feet, refreshing others spirits with Christ’s living water. And be on the lookout for ways that you can be refreshed yourself by living water that flows down in the form you need, to meet the contours of your own life.

1. Luther’s Works; Vol. 43, pg. 132 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Evans, Rachel Held. Inspired. Nelson Books, Nashville: 2018. pg 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/13/europe/italian-neighbors-sing-scli-intl/index.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://qz.com/1817876/korea-offers-free-concerts-online-during-coronavirus/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/woman-helps-elderly-couple-get-food-during-coronavirus-outbreak/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)