

Lent 3

March 15, 2020

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Grace and peace to you!

Considering the social distancing that Hill Avenue Grace has chosen to participate in due to COVID-19, I am trying to find ways to keep the members of Hill Avenue Grace connected to God and our ministry. Because of this, I am exploring ways to keep our community engaged on a virtual level. This past Sunday was our first attempt at this as I live streamed a small devotional service from our chapel on Facebook. However, I also know that there are members of our community who do not have a computer or access to the internet. I do not want them to be excluded from the ministry we do at Hill Avenue Grace. So, included in this mailing is a copy of the small devotional service I did this past Sunday. The contents include the Prayer of the Day, the gospel reading, my sermon, some prayers, and a final blessing. May this document fill you with God's love and remind you that, while we are physically apart from each other, we are still united through Christ Jesus.

Peace and blessings,
Pastor Zach

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Merciful God, the fountain of living water, you quench our thirst and wash away our sin. Give us this water always. Bring us to drink from the well that flows with the beauty of your truth through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL READING – JOHN 4:5-42

⁵[Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A 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.) ⁹The 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.)
¹⁰Jesus 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." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"



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¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but 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.” ¹⁵The 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.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But 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. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷Just 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?” ²⁸Then 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?” ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do 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. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” ³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.”

⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They 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.”

SERMON

I love this story of the woman meeting Jesus at the well in the gospel of John. It is one of the best examples in the New Testament of how one is transformed through entering into loving relationship with Jesus. It is also a great example of how interaction with Jesus leads us to a deeper understanding of our relationship with God.



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Jesus takes this woman on a journey that forever changes her life. He invites her into loving relationship through having a conversation about water. At first, the woman only understands Jesus at a surface level. She believes the water Jesus offers her is only physical water at first, but Jesus reveals to her that the water he provides will forever quench one's thirst. Now, while the woman is intrigued by this type of water, she still thinks it is physical water, so Jesus takes her deeper and asks her to call her husband.

Now, Jesus doesn't do this in order to shame the woman. Many preachers over the years have interpreted this part of the story to be Jesus calling out the woman's sin of promiscuity. However, in this period of time, women had no control over whether or not their husband divorced them. While the gospel doesn't tell us the reason, most biblical scholars believe that this woman was most likely barren in the womb. It was very typical for a husband to divorce his wife if she could not produce offspring. This is also supported by the fact that this woman came to the well at noon. Most of the women in her village would come in the morning when the temperature was still cool and pleasant. Chances are this woman came to the well at noon so she could avoid being ridiculed by the other women. Being barren as a woman was a very shameful thing and a hot topic of gossip. Because of this, Jesus was instead naming the woman's broken reality. Jesus was revealing the truth that she has been shunned by her village and is very much alone. This was to further invite the woman into deeper relationship.

Now, the woman begins to pick up on the fact that Jesus may be more than meets the eye. In order to test this she asks him a theological question about the proper place to worship God. To this, Jesus tells her that the hour is coming when people will worship God in many places, for they will worship in spirit and in truth. In other words, Jesus is telling this woman that what is more important isn't the location of the worship, but the intent of worshipping God with one's heart, mind, body, and soul, our entire being.

This causes the woman to go even deeper in her understanding, and she asks Jesus the burning question about the Messiah's coming. To this Jesus reveals to her, and for the first time in the gospel, "I AM," which is the sacred and holy name of God. This causes the woman to immediately go back to her village, to the people who have shamed her and shunned her, and witness to them this amazing encounter with Jesus. From there, she invites them to come and see. This woman recognized that she had indeed been given living water, for she was in loving relationship with Jesus. When all others rejected her, Jesus invited her to be in abiding relationship. That abiding relationship is the living water that has now quenched her thirst for belonging and acceptance; it has quenched her thirst for love. So much so that she invites the rest of her community, the people who rejected her, to come and experience living water.

We too have been given this gift of living water. It was poured over our heads when we were baptized, giving us new life as our whole being was invited into abiding relationship with Jesus. This living water is a daily gift that reminds us that we will always be loved and accepted by God. But more than that it is also the sustaining water that grows our faith so that we come to better understand God's love for us, so that we come to trust more in that love.



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This is why the faith community makes a promise at baptism to nurture us in God's love from infancy all the way to the elderly years of our life. Whether it's through worship together, learning together, serving together, or fellowship together, we walk with each other and share our stories of faith in order to lift each other up. We pray for each other in joyous time and hard times; we surround each other with compassion; and we share the ways God has lifted us out of the pit; so that we can remind each other that God's love never abandons us.

Think of it this way, whenever we gather together, making up the Body of Christ, and we meet at the well, our baptismal font, we engage in the same conversation between Jesus and the woman. This conversation is played out in our liturgy and it reminds us that no matter how the world has tried to tear us down, shame us, and ridicule us, we are invited into loving relationship with Jesus, and Jesus promises to be the living water that will give us life; a living water that comes to us in the form of scripture, prayer, song, font, and table.

This is especially good news as we find ourselves separated in the hope that we can help curb the spread of the Coronavirus. We may feel alone right now, but we can be assured that Jesus still abides with us, and the living water will never stop flowing. Amen.

PRAYERS

Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

God of living water, send your church beyond boundaries to proclaim your grace. May its witness be a source of refreshment for thirsty souls. Strengthen our voices, that all people can know and believe that Jesus is truly the savior of the world. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of living water, protect from pollution or misuse all rivers, lakes, oceans, and streams. Bless the work of those who dig wells and those who advocate for access to clean water, that all people and animals have enough to drink. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of living water, open the hearts of leaders and authorities, that they hear the cries of the suffering and act with compassion toward them. Bring peace to disputed lands and bring reconciliation to people divided by race, culture, or nationality. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of living water, mend the hearts of those who grieve broken relationships, whether by conflict, abuse, divorce, or death. Draw near to all who are ill. Assure those questioning your presence in the midst of doubt or suffering. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of living water, renew us in the promises of baptism. Join us together in worship, fellowship, and sharing your good news. Embolden us to serve others and to work for justice and peace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**



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God of living water, we thank you for those who endured suffering and who now boast in the glory of God. Pour your Holy Spirit into our hearts and give us peace as we live in the hope of our salvation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shines on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor, and give you peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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