

“Living Water”

Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11;
John 4:5-42

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As we come together this morning, it's hard not to have the events in the world around us on our minds. It would be a little silly of me to think we could come and not have some of that worry and anxiety about the pandemic that is going on in the world. After all, it has impacted how we are doing the service, as we engage with you from afar and as we here spread out amongst ourselves so that we can be appropriate in our concern for how we engage with one another here.

For most of us, I think this is somewhat uncharted territory. I'm not sure I've ever experienced anything quite like it. We worry about not just an epidemic, which is an outbreak of disease in a localized area, but a pandemic that is affecting pretty much the whole world. We hear each day more and more about what's going on. We have concerns about the various places we hear about – first China, then Italy, and then other places around the world. We wonder what kind of wilderness experience we might have as we walk through this time.

Already, things are changing for us. We can't watch some of the things we were going to watch. We can't do some of the things we were going to do. So we wonder. We probably wonder if we will be affected directly, as well. We wonder how the virus might affect our community or us as individuals. I don't have answers. I don't know what's going to happen.

That is not the first time the people of God have walked through uncharted territory. We hear a couple of stories today about people walking through uncharted territory. First the Israelites as they walk through the wilderness. Particularly as they were coming out of Egypt, they were walking through uncharted territory. They were used to working as slaves in a particular place with everything pretty set as far as how they were living. Now, here they were in the wilderness facing spending an

evening at a place where there was no water. They were worried. They wondered, “What’s going to happen to us? We don’t have water.” At least there was no water to replenish their supply. The text doesn’t tell us that they were out of water. It just says that they didn’t have water at that particular place to use.

God, who has taken them on this journey, has invited them to trust him on this journey. At this moment they are worried. Their trust is flagging. God wishes they could have that trust, but it doesn’t mean God abandons them. God shows up. God has Moses open up a stream for them. In the middle of their journey, in the middle of that uncharted territory, God is with them. God shows up and cares for them.

As Jesus comes to that particular well and finds a Samaritan woman there, and begins to talk to her, she feels like she is in uncharted territory. A Jew should not be talking to her, and he’s a man. For those in that particular culture at that particular time, those were mitigating circumstances if not complete barriers to common communication. And yet, Jesus breaks right through those and begins to speak to her, and she is in uncharted territory. “What’s happening. What’s going on? Why has this happened? You’re a Jew. You worship differently.” That’s in response to Jesus’ first sentence asking her for a drink. But after that, he begins to offer her something – that living water.

It is in the midst of being there that Jesus breaks through and lets her know that in the midst of her hard times, God is with her. You see, if she is coming to the well at noon, she’s coming to practice some social distancing. She’s doing social distancing, not because of a disease, but probably because of the way people treat her, the way people view her in her own village. She is some kind of outcast, perhaps, because she’s coming at noon, the hottest time of the day, a time when she knows no one else will be there. But God is there. Jesus is there. In the midst of her uncharted territory, God enters in and the love of God is given to her. She is invited to recognize that she is being cared for.

It's an interesting conversation because as it gets to the point where she says, "Give me this water so I don't have to come here again." Jesus doesn't tell her she will still have to come to the well for water. But he does begin to give her the water she is looking for. It's an interesting way he does that, because he doesn't answer her question, he invites her to do something. He tells her to go bring her husband. She is honest enough to say, "I don't have a husband." It's at that point, I think, that Jesus begins to let her know what this living water is all about. He knows who she is, and he lets her know he knows. Just having someone say they know you and to be there with you is so important. It gives us life to know we are cared for, and Jesus begins to do that. This is a story of Jesus caring for the uncared for. In many ways, so was the passage from Exodus. It was about God caring for the uncared for.

So, as she begins to recognize that she is now cared for, she is a little flustered. When the disciples come back, she leaves her jar and goes back to the village to tell people what she has experienced, that God is present, that she's been cared for. Jesus is giving the woman living water.

The challenge I see Jesus giving us is this: can we care for the uncared for? In some ways it asks us to think about how we can face this wilderness experience. In this time when we recognize the anxiety and the fears that we have, can we move on from those and care for each other through, and beyond, and in spite of, or perhaps because of those anxieties and fears?

One of the things we're going to try is something we're calling the Caring Angel Network. It's just a way of addressing the issue of how we can care for each other during this time when we're supposed to isolate? There are things we can still do. We can talk to each other on the phone. There are all kinds of electronic media where we can communicate with one another. We can be in touch to encourage and support one another. And for those who are willing, there's the option of volunteering to run errands, go to the grocery store, and those kinds of things because it's something we can safely do to care for one another. As we go through this, we will see how

we can think further about what it means to care for one another in the midst of this pandemic.

The other piece these scriptures give us is if we think about God being with us in the midst of this time that is disruptive, that is a crisis, a time of isolation, a time of worry and fear, it's a time of going through our wilderness, it's a time to recognize that God is with us. Oftentimes we don't think so much about the anxieties and concerns of our lives. We tend to get on with our lives. Yet it is God who saw our need, who sent his son to come and help us recognize the grace we need, the living water we need. To care for us in our moments of feeling uncared for. To say that despite the mistakes we've made, we are God's children, and God will be with us. He offers us living water.

The way Romans put it is "God's love has been poured into our hearts." So it is that I still believe that God's love is poured out for us in Christ, and gives us hope in the midst of whatever circumstances we are in, and through that hope allows us to love one another and to share that grace. Whatever the circumstances of the world around us, God loves us. God is with us. God pours that love into our hearts that we might care for one another.

So, let me leave you today with the assurance that God is with us.
Amen.