

Sunday, March 12, 2023 – Third Sunday in Lent

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Introduction

In today's gospel the Samaritan woman asks Jesus for water, an image of our thirst for God. Jesus offers living water, a sign of God's grace flowing from the waters of baptism. The early church used this gospel and those of the next two Sundays to deepen baptismal reflection during the final days of preparation before baptism at Easter. As we journey to the resurrection feast, Christ comes among us in word, bath, and meal—offering us the life-giving water of God's mercy and forgiveness.

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.**

First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

Because the thirsty Israelites quarreled with Moses and put God to the test, Moses cried out in desperation to God. God commanded Moses to strike the rock to provide water for the people. The doubt-filled question—"Is the LORD among us or not?"—received a very positive answer.

¹From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Psalm 95

¹Come, let us sing | to the LORD;
let us shout for joy to the rock of | our salvation.

²**Let us come before God's presence | with thanksgiving
and raise a loud shout to the | LORD with psalms.**

³For you, LORD, | are a great God,
and a great ruler a- | bove all gods.

⁴**In your hand are the caverns | of the earth;
the heights of the hills are | also yours.**

⁵The sea is yours, | for you made it,
and your hands have molded | the dry land.

⁶**Come, let us worship | and bow down,
let us kneel before the | LORD our maker.**

⁷For the LORD is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture and the sheep | of God's hand.

Oh, that today you would | hear God's voice!

⁸**“Harden | not your hearts,
as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah | in the desert.**

⁹There your ancestors | tested me,
they put me to the test, though they had | seen my works.

¹⁰**Forty years I loathed that gener- | ation, saying,
'The heart of this people goes astray; they do not | know my ways.'**

¹¹Indeed I swore | in my anger,
'They shall never come | to my rest.'”

Second Reading: Romans 5:1-11

Though we often hear that God helps those who help themselves, here Paul tells us that through Jesus' death God helps utterly helpless sinners. Since we who had been enemies are reconciled to God in the cross, we now live in hope for our final salvation.

¹Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the ⁶right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely

will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Jesus defies convention to engage a Samaritan woman in conversation. Her testimony, in turn, leads many others to faith.

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?" 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.”

Prayers of Intercession

Sustained by God's abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation, saying "Merciful God," and responding, "receive our prayer."

A brief silence.

We pray for your church. Bless partnerships with other Christians and inter-religious dialogue. Guide the daily work of denominational and congregational leaders. Strengthen our combined witness for the sake of the gospel, that all experience your life-giving love. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for the universe. All creation teems with life, from the depths of the earth and seas to the skies above. Fill us with awe and reverence for the diversity and preservation of life. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for the nations of the world. Topple the dividing walls that separate us from our neighbors. Form us into your beloved community where diversity of gender, race, language, ability, and ethnic origin is celebrated and affirmed. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for those who suffer in mind, body, or spirit. Be present with all who are lonely, and give courage to all who are afraid. Comfort those who live with chronic illness or other sickness (*especially*). Give them your living water always. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for this congregation, especially those preparing for baptism (*at the Vigil of Easter/on Easter Day*). Nurture their faith and pour your love into their hearts. Inspire our community by their testimony to God's grace in their lives. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We give thanks for the lives of all your saints (*especially Gregory the Great, whom we commemorate today*). Their hope in you sustained lives of faith and service. Encourage us with the hope they shared in you. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

A reflection for this Third Sunday in Lent...

Our "Other" at the Well

The woman at the well is a familiar text for many people. This image of Jesus standing at a well talking with a Samaritan woman is emblazoned in our visual and theological imaginations, but as with all Bible stories that we *think* we know, we might do well to take another look! Perhaps relegating this text to the simple moralism "be nice to people who are different" causes us to miss how deeply radical and difficult the message really is. We may assume this gospel simply urges us to stand with the marginalized, especially women. Yet while standing with marginalized women is a commendable action it can lead us, after doing so, to congratulate ourselves for being just like Jesus. A more critical and searching look at this text calls us to the reality that Jesus doesn't just stand with *the other*, Jesus stands with *your other*; *your church's other*. Your church's "Samaritans" may be homosexuals, evangelicals, urban people, rural people, conservatives, liberals, the poor, the rich, the dying, or single parents. Your church's Samaritans could very well be the key to this text. Because, like it or not, when we draw lines between ourselves and other people, Jesus is always on the *other* side of that line. So communities and individuals who thirst for the living water would do well to look to who our own Samaritans might be. And when we find them we should perhaps not be surprised to also find Jesus; a Jesus we thought was all our own but who, in reality, is the living water who comes to us in the strange and the stranger.

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