

First Lesson: Exodus 17:1-7  
Gospel: John 4:5-15

Third Sunday of Lent  
March 15, 2020

“Power of Prayer: Reconciliation”  
Sermon Preached by Pastor Judith Rainforth  
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Welcome to American Lutheran Church. Today is an unusual day. Today we are in times that we have never been in in our country, and I ask you that you continue to pray fervently for our world so that we can find a solution to what is going on with Corona virus, that our Bishop has asked us to not gather in big groups. She has asked us to not have worship services until at least April 1. So all of our events and worship services will be cancelled until then. We will carry on as a community in Christ who will support one another as brothers and sisters in Christ by phone calls, by texts, and the staff will continue to be here to carry out what we need to carry out, and we will be recording these messages on a regular basis. Thank you, and let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, we thank you that we have been able to gather today as brothers and sisters in Christ. Be with us, help us to live with patience for healing. Help us to not live in fear, but as we are together on this third weekend of Lent that we would focus on the power of prayer, reconciliation, and that we continue our prayerful journey throughout this Lenten season and beyond. We ask for healing for those that have become ill because of this virus, we ask for healing for us so that whatever is bothering us will be healed. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

Our Gospel reading today is from John chapter 4. Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone to the city to buy food. 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." 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." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep, where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty, the water that I will give you will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." 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." This is the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The story of the nameless woman, the nameless Samaritan woman at the well is full of many truths and powerful lessons for you and I. In our Gospel today, we read about the conversation between Jesus and a lone woman who had come to get water from a well known as Jacob's well located about a mile from the city of Sychar in Samaria. This was an extraordinary woman, she was a Samaritan, a race of people the Jews despised and they believed they had no claim on their God. They did not think this other culture was worthy of God. She was an outcast, looked down upon by her own people. She had been married five times and she was living with a man who was not her husband. Drawing water and chatting at the well was the social high point of a woman's day in that time. But this woman was ostracized, even from her own people, and more importantly, condemned by herself.

Jesus knew everything about her and that puzzled her. She was downtrodden, she was surprised when she came to the well and a man was talking to her. I don't know if any of you have ever been in a place that you felt like that. I have felt like the woman at the well because I too was divorced. But praise be to God that I found my way, beyond condemnation and into reconciliation through the power of prayer, and the gift of living water.

That is what our journey in this Lenten season is about – the power of prayer. And today on reconciliation. What are the lessons in this scripture so that we don't have to live like this woman felt, but we can know that we are forgiven, we don't have to live in our past because we believe in the living water of Jesus Christ. It is through Jesus alone where we obtain reconciliation. Jesus said in this chapter of John, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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." The woman is so comforted and said to Jesus, "Sir, give me this water so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus' ministry to the Samaritan woman reveals the value of all people, of all people to God and that Jesus wants us to be inclusive and show love to everyone, that we not be selective on who we love.

Love is not about wanting something, love is about being with a person. When I look into your eyes and I see Jesus in your eyes, that's love. I don't want anything from you, I just love you. That is what God is calling us to do. In verse 7-9 we hear, "A Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said, 'Give me a drink.' And the Samaritan woman said, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?'" She knew, she knew that the Jews didn't share anything in common with her people. And Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying this to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman finally did recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

The entire account of the woman at the well reveals the absolute truths about our lives. Salvation comes to those who recognize their desperate need for their spiritual life that they do not have without Jesus Christ, the living water. Salvation comes to those who confess and

repent of sin and desire forgiveness. Before the Samaritan woman could embrace the Savior, she had to concede the full burden of her sins. Peace and reconciliation come to those who take hold of Jesus as their Savior. What sins are holding us back? What do we need to confess before God so that we can realize the living water of Jesus Christ?

In 12 step programs, there are steps suggested for peace and prayerful reconciliation. Steps 4-6 made a searching and moral inventory of ourselves and admitted to God, ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. We are entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. Jesus doesn't measure us by our past or our pedigree. Jesus changes us. Everything we go through changes us. Out of our brokenness, God can use us to help others. Jesus doesn't need us to explain him, just to introduce him as the living water. The Samaritan woman not only recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but her testimony lead many others to Jesus. So out of our pain, out of our sorrows, even out of a time like we are in now, we can use this to testify to the power of prayer and Jesus Christ as the living water for us.

So today, please recognize the power of prayer and reconciliation as you share your faith with others in word and deed. We can focus on the saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as we embrace the waters of our baptism and live our resurrection faith knowing about the living water and that we will never have to thirst again.

Last week I was going to have a wonderful experience in my ministry, I baptized a 92 year old woman in our chapel. It was the most awesome experience that day to know that this 92 year old woman who had gone to church most of her life but had never ever been asked about her baptism. She experienced the living water in a new way. The water that Jesus gives us will become in each of us a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. If you think about when you are out in nature and you see things like that, waterfalls or whatever, that can be indicative of a gushing, living water in our life. The water that Jesus gives, that only Jesus gives.

I shared earlier that Pastor Lowell and I have had wonderful conversations and we were thinking that this day of not being able to fill our sanctuary with people would never come, but it has come. We are going to make something special out of this and we are going to grow through this time, and we are going to experience the living waters in a new way. I am going to ask you again – when I usually gather in the prayer chapel at 11:15 until noon on Tuesdays, we sit in silence and in prayer meditation. I am going to ask that you continue to do that, not in our chapel, because we won't be gathering in there, but at home. Set reminders, an alarm, or whatever that every Tuesday we intentionally pray for our world in relation to this Corona virus, that we can find some cure, whatever it takes. And also so that you all stay healthy. That we all respect how we need to be in our society, helping one another, reaching out in ways that we never thought about doing, because we all are brothers and sisters in Christ and we can be an example of not living in fear and dread, that we wake up each morning thanking

God. Thanking God that we have another day to serve and to experience the living water. I am here to tell you it doesn't matter what has happened in your life. I shared something I wish would have never happened in my life, but it doesn't define me, just as this woman wasn't defined, and you are not defined by anything else except your faith in Jesus Christ and ask every day to be inspired by the Holy Spirit so that you can continue. You may want to get some little notes, and if you have stamps, send a note to some of the people in this congregation, let them know you are thinking about them. Let them know that we are not alone at this time. Ask yourself each day – what can you do to make a difference in this world? What can you do to be an example of the living water of Jesus Christ?

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, I thank you that we can be together in different ways because of our technology. I thank you that my brothers and sisters in Christ are committed to the ministry of American Lutheran Church and that they will continue to support this church in thought, word and deed. As we go from here to do your bidding, help us to be joy filled that we can serve in so many ways, and that we do not have to live in fear. Amen