

Rev. Dr. David Holyan
“Leaping-for-Life Water”
First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood
Sunday, March 15, 2020

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and 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.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For 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. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

John 4:5-15

So he 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 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.’

Let us pray. Gracious God, take these words from song and prayer and scripture, the words that you've laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless, and transform them into the word of Jesus Christ. And let that word speak to each of us as we have need this day and into this week. Let it be a word of comfort and peace, a word of reassurance and hope, a word of calm in the midst of an anxious time. We ask this in Christ's faithful name. Amen.

I don't know about Karen, but I know I've been here before preaching before an empty church. The choirs here. Bill and Travis are robed. Karen and I are ready. It's time to deliver the sermon. I look up and there's no one here. The sound of my voice echoing through the sanctuary. Usually, I wake up at that moment and realize that it's just a bad dream, but not today. Today, because of the coronavirus pandemic, the church pews are empty. And upon thinking about this for the last couple of days, I was torn in trying to make sense of how we could be the church, but not be gathered together for worship. And then thankfully, early this morning, I read an article in The Washington Post by a professor from Wheaton. And he said that sometimes the message for us as Christians, the message to love your neighbor as yourself, means that when it's appropriate as it is now, we need to stay home and stay away from one another. So this is us practicing that Christian message of loving our neighbors and caring for them as we would want to be cared for. Because none of us want to catch this virus. None of us want to have to go through all that that means.

And so, even in our absence, we are still the body of Christ. We are being faithful to what God invites us to be and do. And maybe this morning more than most, we realize our trust in God and how it is that we are the body, not together, but spread out

throughout the community, in our homes, offering prayers for the well being of the world and for each other. So I invite you to be open to how that is working for you. And when I came to the scripture again early yesterday morning after getting the news late Friday night that the presbytery was inviting the churches to all be closed today, I came at it with a different eye, with a different thought, and a different concern. Because I imagine that each of us in our own way are like Jesus in this moment, and the woman. Both of us are thirsty for some living water most of us are thirsty for some calm and peace. Most of us are thirsty for this to be over even though, according to most experts, we're just on the front end of it. Jesus offers this woman living water. Water that, we learned in seminary, is the kind that bubbles up to eternal life and that the Spirit gives us this water, each of us in our souls. But what struck me yesterday and even early this morning was not so much the water but where do we go to find it? Because as the woman says to Jesus, "The well is deep and you didn't bring a bucket."

And so I've been wondering in this moment of high anxiety, of fear, of uncertainty, of stress, where do we find these wells of living water for ourselves? And the first place that came to me almost seemed automatic, the well of Scripture. It is the place that I turn to in the moments that seem to be beyond my ability to comprehend. This ancient Word somehow finds a voice that speaks to my heart; hopefully, to yours, into circumstances that were never imagined at the time of their writing. And what I found was Psalm 62:5-7 - *For God alone, my soul waits in silence. My hope is from God. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I shall not be shaken. On God, rest my deliverance and my honor, my mighty rock. My refuge is in God. Trust in God at all times, oh, people. Pour out your hearts before him. God is a refuge for us.*

As I got in touch with my own anxiety and fear about the pandemic and about worshipping and preaching in an empty sanctuary, the thought that God is that place that we can find safety and rest was reassuring to me. God alone is our rock and our salvation, our fortress. We shall not be shaken. I believe that meditating on this passage or many others can offer us the kind of peace and reassurance that each of us need this day and in the days and weeks to come.

Another well that seems somewhat automatic for us as Christians to turn to is the well of prayer, that we can offer prayers for the world. In fact, for this service, we changed the response to the peace of Christ to be more inclusive, that we offer Christ's peace to everyone, not just to one another. We can say prayers like that or we can get a little more creative and offer prayers in writing by sending cards to one another, to those who are near us, our neighbors, our friends, or even far away. In fact, one of the things I imagined was writing out prayers in calligraphy. And I was reminded of this at our staff Christmas party that we just had this Friday, which I know was delayed. But that was because an ice storm moved it. So we finally could find a Friday to be together. And at the party, Dee and I were talking about a little message that I had left him after a Thursday night Bible study. The day before he was wearing a Detroit Tigers baseball cap that had a very beautiful D, which is their logo, inscribed on the cap. And I asked him, "Are you a Tigers fan?" And he looked at me said, "No, it's a D. Don't you get it?" And he said, "And by the way, I love calligraphy." Well, Friday night or Thursday night - excuse me - after Bible study one evening on the whiteboard, I did my best to capture that "D" with all the curls and the swooshes. And then on the bottom circle of the D, I put rays like the sunshine because I call Dee sunshine. And I realized again that we can give each other messages in writing that speak to our love and care for one another. Whether it be a prayer written in calligraphy or an email to a friend.

Another well that we might turn to which seems self evident this day is the well of stillness. Standing and preaching before an empty church is bizarre to say the least. But it could also be an invitation. An invitation for us to realize that it's okay to intentionally turn off the television to stop the flood of news that keeps coming minute by minute charts that are growing exponentially, concerns that seem to outpace answers. Maybe we shut off the television, the computer, the cell phone, and we just sit in a comfortable place. We close our eyes and we simply focus on our breathing. Breathing deeply in and out. Not the kind of shallow breathing that seems to be filling all those that are buying toilet paper. But deep breathing, the kind of breathing that reminds us that we'll be okay no matter what.

And then the final well that I thought about that we can turn to to find living water for these days of forced isolation and separation is the well of a quiet, intentional, meditative walk outside. There have been reports that the virus may live on surfaces for minutes, hours, days. I'm not sure anyone knows the truth yet. But I don't believe that there's been any reports of anyone catching this virus by simply walking outside, in a park or down their street. But again, not doing so in a hurried way. Doing so in a quiet, intentional, meditative way. And maybe combining the well of prayer by offering prayers for those houses that you walk by. Because if we are to be the church and to continue to be the church, we need to continue serving and loving our neighbors, by not coming here on a Sunday, but maybe also by offering prayer for them as we walk by their houses.

And so, I want you to think about the wells of living water that you can turn to for your own well being, how you might turn to

Christ through scripture, prayer, stillness, or a quiet walk. But I also want to invite you to think about how you are that “well” for others, for your neighbors, for your friends, for your family, for the strangers that you happen to see while you're out. Because Lord knows in this time of sacrifice and uncertainty, we all need to love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.