

### 3 Lent A

Exodus 17:1-7

Psalms 95

Romans 5:1-11

John 4:5-42

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Something Real

(COVID-19)

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A lot can happen in a week. Last week I was in Superstore and it was so quiet that I was wondering where everyone was. Friday, on my way home from work I went to Superstore – walked in the doors and walked out again. As I said, a lot can happen in a week.

Grace and peace to you from Christ Jesus.

This morning's gospel reading is informative for today – with all that is happening. It's a story teeming with hope, encouragement and assurance for times of transition and anxiety.

Let's just step back for a moment, because I think it's helpful to understand the situation in the day when John wrote this. It's a great story even just as we heard it, but if we dig into it a little bit asking “why was this written?” or “what was going on?” it helps us to gain a deeper understanding.

- The Gospel of John is written about the year somewhere between 90-100 CE (possibly as late as 110.)
- Jesus has been dead for at least 60 years, maybe 80.
- There are no first hand witnesses of the resurrection left, the Apostles are gone and we're in to 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Christians.
- These Christians do not have the Bible, they are persecuted, they are small in number and without much support. Because, actually, it was illegal to even be a Christian – they are in hiding.
- Jesus, who was expected to return at any moment, hadn't (they were thinking this for 40 years already) and it was beginning to sink in that he wouldn't.
- Even the Jewish Temple (dates back to the year 516 BCE) had been destroyed 30 years ago – and not rebuilt.
- We begin to understand that all that seemed stable and certain was no longer. All that should have inspired peace and joy was in jeopardy, all the hope put into a newfound faith was possibly just another scam.

Can you imagine what that would have been like? I could imagine that there would be uncertainty, fear, people avoiding gathering in large or public ways, people wondering if they had given up their previous life for

something that was a sham, even the religion of old was in a time of transition and change.

This is the context into which John introduces the Samaritan woman encountering Jesus at the well. When we encounter a woman in the gospels, it's a clue to us to pay attention. Women, playing a key role in a story was meant to be an attention getter. And that is why John uses a woman in his story.

She is the embodiment of the fear and anxiety of the community that had one foot in the old ways (as she talks about Jacob's well) and one foot out the door (as she lives in a sexist and judgmental society.) She is the symbol of a divided community. She is the holder of traditions that taught who was saved and who was not. She exemplifies the mood of the day where nothing seemed real anymore, nothing seemed true, nothing was for certain. Faith and life were shaken to their very core – as she is alone at the well at the hottest time of the day.

And... she is the light of hope. Despite all that conspires to hold her back, all that was accumulating to undermine her as a human being, all the lies that beat down on her like the midday sun and keep her oppressed (the whole town knows her sordid past) *she knows* the Messiah is coming. She is holding on, clinging to that one thread of promise – which is a direct correlation to the early church that tenaciously held on to that same thread, Jesus is coming.

She is the model of a *faith in waiting*, a faith desperately in need of transformation. As the early church waited for Christ to return, they became fearful that they had gotten it wrong. People stopped believing, Jesus wasn't doing anything.

And John uses her to aid this transformation as he puts her into a key role, an active role. You heard it, she leaves her water jar behind and runs to the village. She leaves behind her old ways of waiting for God to do something and instead becomes the gospel – she learns that faith is something to be lived not waited for. She learns that the Messiah has called her to partake, not of some holy benefactor program, but to actually be one who changes the lives of others. And that's what she does. She tells the whole village, she introduces them to Jesus, he stays for a 2 days and they are assured in their faith – proclaiming for themselves – this is the savior of the world.

The story answers the doubts and pain and questions that lingered in people's hearts. It is a story for us today. We who are so far removed from the life and times of Jesus, who can never hope to sit by the well and

chat, who struggle with fewer and fewer members, whose families often don't believe anymore, and we ourselves who wonder if there isn't something more real than what is before us. Isn't that the bottom line – we just want something real? Something to be true, absolutely true?

You know the old analogy of the glass that is half full or half empty. It's often used to describe one's outlook on life, but sometimes we get so caught up in the dilemma of that perspective that we forget there is a glass of water right in front of us.

Jesus is the overlooked living water for the world. We are surrounded in every moment of every day with the good news of God in more ways than we can describe or imagine. In countless ways Jesus is having that very conversation with us – telling us the truth about ourselves, telling us that there is living water, gathering the townsfolk to be a vibrant community.

At the end of this story, which we will hear later, the people are so intrigued by the woman's testimony that they invite Jesus to stay with them. He does for 2 days. After which they are restored in hope and identity and duty.

It makes me think, if a lot can happen as I was shopping from one week to the next, it's pretty incredible what Jesus can do with a couple of days.

So, if you feel like your faith is on the edge, if you feel like you're not sure about all that is happening in the world, if you grieve the loss of family from the pews, if you grieve the loss of loved ones who have died – may we turn to the Savior of the world who does not fail us and may we turn to the living water that dwells in each of us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.