

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
605 Madison St., Marshall WI  
Third Sunday of Lent John 4:5-15 [5-42]  
Pastor Nancy M. Raabe**

A good friend of mine recently went on a 5-day desert retreat with a group from a national organization called the Wild Church Network, churches that encounter God in the wilderness. Each participant was taken to a remote location in Northern California and left there with little to sustain them through the five days. No tent, no cooking stove, no cell phone service, barely any provisions except for some water. The idea was to come to a greater awareness of the primal connection between human beings and God's creation as a source of worship, with nothing to get in the way. She was mainly afraid that bears might attack her at night, but she learned from their dung that they were curious but keeping their distance.

I tried to imagine myself in a similar situation. When I did, what came over me was deep thirst—thirst for human contact, and thirst for the reassurance that God would sustain me in such a forsaken place.

At first the conversation at Jacob's well between Jesus and the Samaritan woman sounds like a lighthearted exchange. Neither expected to find the other there—women were only supposed to collect water at dawn and at dusk, so what was she doing there at noon? And why was Jesus, a Jew, sitting at the Samaritan people's sacred spot? Remember, Jews and Samaritans were enemies so would normally not interact at all.

At first the woman is intrigued that Jesus would even speak to her. Then she's confused about how he could get water with no pail. Then she becomes suspicious when she perceives that he is superseding their ancestor Jacob. Then when he talks about the water he gives becoming a spring of water gushing up into eternal life, she appears to play along but without understanding: "Sir, give me this water so that I may never have to keep coming to this well" -- to save her the trouble of hauling her pail back and forth.

The turning point comes when Jesus reveals to her that he knows her situation— that she has had five husbands, and the one she has now is not her husband.

Picture such a life. Because women could not divorce their husbands, this means she has been widowed five times. Imagine her suffering over the years, the deep loneliness after each loss, the new dimensions of heartbreak each time she had to bury a husband. Now she is with someone who is not her husband, which suggests he is not a suitable life companion. Below the layers of bravado, deep down this woman remains desperately lonely. Her deep thirst for loving, committed companionship is so vast that she may have become dull to it, losing her awareness of how much she needs that to survive--as sometimes happens to us older folks when we go for a time without water and lose the awareness that we are thirsty. Perhaps she is even on the verge of succumbing to despair and her life intersects with Jesus' at just the right time.

In Jesus' presence her layers begin to peel away. When he tells her that her people will come to know and worship God the Father, the woman reveals that she has

been waiting for the Messiah to come and proclaim the truth. Imagine her astonishment when Jesus then says, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

The outcome is that she becomes a true believer who immediately takes this revelation back to the marketplace and rallies her community around Jesus. The Samaritan woman is truly a pioneer for our time: She sees who Jesus really is and she does not hesitate to go and share this good news. It's so different from Nicodemus last week: He too became a believer but he kept it secret. Not this woman: John writes that "Many Samaritans from that city believed because of the woman's testimony." And what greater accolade could be given to her than verse 42?

<sup>42</sup>They 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."

Friends, in the midst of this time of thirst for normalcy and for freedom from fear, I urge you to become emissaries of the truth just as this woman was, in whatever way feels authentic. Just like my friend on her wild retreat, we are kind of in a forsaken place at the moment, aren't we? A strange desert in which we're confined, from which we can't see the way out?

There is fear all around us, fear that in some areas of life seems to be getting out of hand. The fear is real and it's understandable. But as Christ's followers, we know that Jesus is there, sitting at the well, urging us to drink from the gushing fountain of living water he gives us that sustains us in this life and the next.

Let's follow the Samaritan woman into the marketplace, proclaiming the truth that Christ is with us in the midst of all life's situations. He entrusts to us the power to calm the storm. In what ways can you say to others, "Peace! Be still"?

Perhaps our words of reassurance and faith can be, "Don't be afraid. Be smart." Take these words to others. Discourage the hoarding of goods, the spreading of panic, the sharing of information that is not factually accurate. Take whatever news you see on Facebook with a grain of salt. Check our web site for the latest updates to our worship life, and if you want to get our news by email and you're not already, leave your email address on the Welcome Desk. Like our Facebook page if you haven't already; links are posted there to our news releases. I don't know whether this might be our last in-person gathering for a while. We'll notify you by these means if it is. And if so, you can watch sermon videos on our YouTube channel, and we plan to live-stream our services in real time through Facebook Live. We'll post instructions for how to do that. And the sermons in printed form continue to be available on our web site.

During this liminal time, I invite you to seek hope and comfort especially in the Psalms. I will close with two verses from Psalm 91 to which a couple of our members have called my attention:

No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.

Amen.