March 15, 2020- Come and See the Living Water of Jesus Christ!

John 4:5-42, Exodus 17:1-7, Romans 5:1-11

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Last week in our gospel reading from John we were introduced to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came in secret to see Jesus in the middle of the night. Nicodemus wanted to know how he could come to be in a relationship with God. This week in our gospel reading, we meet a Samaritan woman with no name. She is filling her jugs with water from Jacob’s well in the midday sun near the city of Sychar in Samaria. Jesus is weary from his travels and approaches her requesting a drink of water. There is a reason why the author of John places these pericope’s one right after the other. Do you remember how I spoke of symbols and signs in the gospel of John last week? This pericope again showcases the author’s use of literary imagery of light and dark, belief and non-belief, love and faith, and water, both practical and living water.

Our reading today states that Jesus was heading back to Galilee from Judea through Samaria. Now, going through Samaria was the most direct route but Jewish folks would never have traveled this way. You see the Samaritans and the Jews did not get along. Samaritans originated from the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. After the Assyrian defeat in 721 BCE the Samaritans intermarried, therefore were not considered to be of pure Jewish descent. They also claimed Jacob as their patriarch and established a different temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria as the only place to worship God. Samaritans were outcasts and outsiders in ancient society, so Jewish folks would take the extra days to travel around the country rather than go through it. But Jesus stated that they had to go through Samaria…..

The reading moves along, and they all arrive at the well. The disciples are hungry and go off to buy some food leaving Jesus alone. This again was not the custom as Jewish folks would not have bought any food from the Samaritans, nor would they eat, drink, or worship with them. As Jesus is resting nearby, a woman appears carrying empty jugs to fill at the well. It is midday and it is hot, so Jesus asks the woman for some water. This too would have been uncustomary on many levels; a woman In antiquity would not travel alone for water in the midday sun, she would have accompanied the other women in early morning to get their daily supply. Men in the position of a Rabbi or teacher would not have even gone to the well, and they certainly would not have spoken to a woman, let alone ask for a drink of water from an outcast.

Jesus was breaking boundaries ethnically, culturally, and religiously. In breaking these boundaries, he offered living water of love, mercy, grace, and compassion!

Jesus begins to converse with the woman, and we find out that she has been married 5 times. This would have been why she was alone at the well in the heat of the midday sun. She would have been disowned and dismissed by the other women in the community because of her supposed loose morals and unethical behaviour. But we do not know if that is necessarily true, many scholars believe that the woman was likely infertile and that was why she had been married 5 times. Honour and shame were customary in antiquity and because of her inability to produce children she would have been shamed, and worthless in the eyes of those around her. Life was not easy for the woman, but this is where grace comes, this is where God comes because although she was condemned by everyone else, Jesus did not condemn her. In fact, he did the opposite, he offered her a gift, a gift of living water, a gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, the love of God was poured into her heart and she became whole.

Let’s take a moment to think about what this must have been like for the woman at the well. Here is this stranger, this Jewish man who shouldn’t even be near her. Yet, he begins a conversation with her, he seems to know everything about her; her past, her mistakes, her identity, yet he still offers her this gift of reconciliation, this gift of living water from God, this eternal spring where she will never thirst. Can you imagine how that must have made her feel? Jesus did not just speak to her that day, he actually “saw” her, and he loved her for exactly who she was, a beloved child of God.

Realizing the gift that she has been given she goes back to the city leaving her empty containers at the well. She was no longer thirsty for the ordinary water that came from the well, she was immersed in the living water of Jesus Christ. She was immersed in the peace, grace, and mercy of God and encouraged all to “come and see.” And surprisingly, the townsfolk listened to her, this woman who was an outsider, was now a respected member of the community. Jesus then went into the city of Sychar and stayed for two more days letting his light and promise for hope shine throughout the community. Yes, Jesus had to go through Samaria, he knew that God did not send him into the world to condemn the world, Jesus was sent into the world so that folks could be saved through him (John 3:17).

Note the difference between Jesus’ conversation with the woman and Nicodemus. Nicodemus knew who Jesus was, he was an insider, yet he did not believe. He could not move past his religious views to receive the living water that Jesus Christ was offering him, he was still in the darkness. The woman, on the other hand, was an outsider who had no idea who Jesus was. She was not afraid to question him, she was open to debate and conversation, she was open to the light of Jesus Christ. Jesus grew impatient with Nicodemus, but he had patience and nurtured the woman allowing her to grow in faith and understanding. Nicodemus’ disbelief is evident in his parting words of “How can this be?” Whereas the woman’s finals words were “He cannot be the Messiah can he?” The woman’s belief allowed her to be liberated from the chains that bound her. Her identity evolved and she was given new life and freedom in the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

We too are given the living water found in Jesus Christ, it is in the Word, it is in the bread and wine that we will share during communion today. It is in the forgiveness of our sins; it is in being perfectly imperfect and knowing that it is okay. This living water fills our hearts and liberates us from the chains that bind our lives. We to are given new life and promise, we to are given the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ our Lord.

This living water of Jesus Christ is found when we are in times of challenge and crisis. It is calling and checking in on our neighbours and shut ins to see if they have any needs. It is offering a listening ear to those who are stressed and anxious. It is knowing that God is with us in these incredibly fluid times of change and it is relying on the strength and comfort of God to give us strength and courage for the days to come.

So, I invite each of you to immerse yourself in that living water, let it rush over you as it did to the woman at the well, and may you extend the invitation for and to all to come and see. Amen.