

Basic Training: Hydrate!
By The Rev. Mary A. Morrison
March 15, 2020
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church
Clemson, SC

Let us pray: God of grace, you have given us minds to know you, hearts to love you, and voices to sing your praise. Fill us with your Spirit, that we may celebrate your glory and worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear the word of the Lord as recorded in **Exodus 17:1-7**.¹

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

² The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"

³ But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

⁴ So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

⁵ The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."

Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Listen now for the Good News from the gospel of **John 4:5-42**.

⁵ So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

⁹ 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.)

¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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."

¹⁵ 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."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you¹ say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."

³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.

³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² 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."

Our two texts today offer us questions to ponder. From Exodus 17:7 we hear, “**Is the Lord among us or not?**” and from John 4:29b we ask, “**He cannot be the Messiah, can he?**” Our days and even hours are full of questions. How do we hear these questions for us today? The word of God gives us nourishment when we are thirsty and in need of God’s living waters. Let us learn from our ancestors in the faith.

The Israelites had been on their Exodus journey and were now at Mt. Rephidim, the last stop before reaching Mount Sinai. We learn the place name of Rephidim is changed to Massah and Meribah. Massah means “testing” for the people were testing God by testing God’s disciple Moses. Meribah means “quarrelling” because even though God had provided manna right before this story, the people still complained and doubted that God existed.

Many today probably feel like we are being sent into the wilderness—where social distancing is required for the good health and well-being of all, where even those who are not vulnerable to disease are kept from worshipping in community in sanctuary or Tartan Hall. When others make decisions for us we naturally want to complain that we cannot have life as usual. Like the Israelites, our human nature can take root and move us deeper into distancing ourselves from God. We find ourselves asking, “**Is God among us or not?**” What do you think?

God provided manna from heaven that usually came from the earth. God provided water from a rock on the earth that usually rained down from heaven. God continued to endure the people’s testing God through the prophet Moses. God continued to steadfastly love and provide for the people. So too, God continues to provide for us, not leaving us alone, but perhaps showing us something new in how we might worship.

In our present circumstances as a nation and world, the overabundance of news about COVID-19 can strike fear in one’s heart and cause us to question our faith and even God’s existence. Yet I believe God still provides through God’s servants—providing compassion, witness, and service just as Jesus did. These are words that embody the mission and ministry of our deacons. As I write this and am praying for you our deacons are calling you and learning how you are. We are learning that some of you have moved, some of you have had a loved one die this week, some of you have disconnected phone numbers, some of you are hard to reach, and there may be some spiritual distancing taking place among us.

Nevertheless, we are compelled to be the body of Christ, even when apart from one another. We reach out to one another especially during wilderness times, during suffering, and when we are advised not to be the “church gathered.” The biblical witness can teach us things about God even in these wilderness times. God does not leave us alone and so the church, God’s body, will reach out even in today’s uncertain times. We learn that several of our sisters need healing from surgeries, that some of us are on a cruise ship hoping to get home, that many have plans for future travels that may be put on hold. We are the body of Christ even when scattered in the world.

The gospel text today poses some contrasts for us. We find that the one who asks for a drink first is Jesus. We hear the woman respond acknowledging the generally accepted social norms of the day that should draw a line between a Jew like Jesus and a Samaritan woman like herself. Such boundaries do not keep Jesus from engaging her at the well, but give him the opportunity to introduce living water into the conversation. She responds by telling Jesus that he has no bucket and the well is deep. She is not taking the bait, at least not yet. She tells Jesus that this well is Jacob's well, implying blessings from its waters to many for generations before her.

But Jesus tells her that **living water** is different from water. Living water produces eternal life. Jesus spoke like this to Nicodemus in the story last weekⁱⁱ that being **born again** is different from being born. Being born again produces understanding, seeing things as the Spirit sees. The Spirit moves and causes understanding and living water to gush up and out of believers. Later in John's gospel Jesus says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"ⁱⁱⁱ

Now the woman wants this living water so she may never be thirsty again. Jesus changes the subject and asks about her husband and she tells him the truth, realizing he is a prophet. She too changes the subject and asks about worship. At the time Samaritans believed that the only place of true worship was on Mount Gerizim and Jews believed the only true place of worship was in Jerusalem. This was a long-standing debate among Samaritans and Jews. Jesus, intrigued by her interest in matters of worshipping God provides an answer that both Samaritans and Jews can equally receive: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."^{iv}

I believe that same answer is sufficient for us today, as we are the church scattered—we worship God, not in a particular place, but in our **being the church** in the world—worshipping God **in spirit and truth**.

Jesus had compassion for the Samaritan woman, treating her not as his disciples did based on racial, gender, or other prejudicial expectations, but rather speaking with her as a worthy person, calling her to worship faithfully. Jesus engages her at the well. In the Bible what happens at wells is betrothals. Jesus, the bridegroom engages his bride at the well—the Samaritan woman, his disciples, and us.

Once the woman has her answer about worship, she speaks about the coming Messiah, a logical theological progression. "I know that the Messiah is coming...when he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Here for the first time in the gospel Jesus reveals he is the One who is the Messiah and he uses language reminiscent of the voice of God with Moses at the burning bush,^v "I am."

Her response takes place after the disciples return and question Jesus about why he is speaking with her—implying those prejudicial social constraints. They are complainers like the Israelites in the Exodus story. But the woman is not like the Israelites—she takes action after receiving

the Good News. She goes to tell the people in the city about Jesus, making a statement “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” and asking the question we began with: “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” The syntax of this question in Greek assumes a negative answer, yet the woman’s actions show she believes Jesus is the Messiah. The writer of the gospel leaves it up to us to figure out for ourselves who Jesus is. **Is the Lord among us or not?**

Jesus had compassion for the woman and revealed himself as the Messiah, and she witnesses he is the Messiah and then serves him by becoming a witness to others of this Good News, inviting them to come and see for themselves and they do. She is a witness who is theologically wise enough in the Spirit to realize that Jesus must be the Messiah because only the Messiah could know everything about her.

So for us who are not able to gather at the well of our sanctuary today, know this, my friends: Jesus comes to wherever we are and engages us, the church—his bride, to be witnesses and believe he is the Messiah, knows everything about who we are, and calls us into service by being witnesses of his saving grace. It is that ***being witnesses of saving grace*** that we must embody in all times, but especially in such uncertain times as these.

I have read many good articles in the past few days about the opportunity that this health crisis is before us, for the church to show its compassion, witness, and service to the world. We have an opportunity not to complain, but to care. May we show compassion by reaching out with words, calling those you know who are among the least of these—those beloved by God (widows, orphans, and the poor), those over 60 years of age, those with compromised immune systems no matter their age, those who are lonely, those who are forgotten.

May we be witnesses of God’s loving kindness and be confident in talking about things of faith in this crisis. Talk about the love of Jesus, the value of sacrifice, the importance of caring, the power of prayer, the gift of forgiveness, the hope for tomorrow. But also pray with and for one another. And read your Bible ***aloud*** so that you hear the Good News of Jesus Christ for us, for the world.

May you be servants of God gushing up like living water that nourishes, looking for places and people that are thirsty and offering your gifts and talents to make this world healthier, safer, kinder, and better for all people. Many of these may be among first responders and medical personnel in particular. Give thanks continually, for the more grateful we are the more blessings we realize we have to share with others.

In your prayers, I encourage you to remember “the other” who is the child that may go hungry if school is not in session unless we help feed him. For “the other” who is the octogenarian who lives down the street and is fearful of leaving home and needs groceries. For “the other” who is overwhelmed by change and confused by the news. The list could go on so I ask that you stay connected as the church scattered in ways that you can without gathering together. Do wash your hands and fold them together in prayer, and lay your heads down to enjoy Sabbath rest in

its purest sense—sleep a little more, relax, breathe deeper, and pray more. Take on more prayer for Lent. God knows the world needs it.

I leave you with this prayer I wrote and prayed for our deacons in 2017 and came across on Friday. I feel it is appropriate now, helping us all to keep things in perspective and focused on the One God who loves and cares for us all.

A Prayer for Deacons Meeting
August 20, 2017

Most Gracious God,

You are full of more wisdom than we can imagine, more joy than we can experience, more kindness than we can bestow, more creativity than we can ponder, more glory than we can behold, more love than we can share.

Because you are more and we are less, we ask that you make us like John the Baptist serving alongside his Lord Jesus, the Christ. Because you are more and we are less, we ask that you gather and scatter us as your servants ready to learn of you and from you, willing to open our own lives to your Spirit's movement and formation, eager to know your people and offer your mercy and care when times are difficult.

Because you are more and we are less, fill us to capacity and overflowing with who you are, how you are, and what you are so that the world may know You. Attune us to your greatness so that we might spend our days with you, on behalf of you, and because of you.

Because you are God, the Word of God, and the Word made flesh, speak to our flesh, give us your words of compassion and grace to share when your people are hurting, when your people are filled with fear, when your people are exhausted by burdens too heavy to bear. Call up within us, your Spirit of truth to speak and comfort, to proclaim and heal, to whisper and listen, so that we might know that all we do or say is by your power and love.

Who are we that you are mindful of us? We are yours, O Loving God. We are yours. May we always honor and glorify you with the little we have and the more you provide. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

- To whom do I need to show compassion?
- What can I say to show them God's love when I call or reach out with words?
- Am I in need of compassion this day? How can I ask another for help?
- Whom will I call to be God's witness to me?
- When has God filled me with living water, revealing the divine nature to me?
- What have I learned about God in this encounter? About myself?
- Where do I see places and people who are thirsty for living water?
- How can I be a bucket for Jesus and pour out living water as a witness to God's goodness and love?

ⁱ All Scriptures quoted are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible.

ⁱⁱ John 3:1-21.

ⁱⁱⁱ John 7:37-38.

^{iv} John 4:24.

^v Exodus 3:13-15