

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have a prayer in our Morning Prayer office of Matins known as “The Call of Abraham.” This prayer was first published in 1941 in a book titled Daily Prayer, and in 1958, it found its way into the Service Book and Hymnal we know as the “Red Book” that was used by Lutheran congregations for decades. Given that this prayer is in our morning prayer office, the prayer can be a foundation for the day the lies ahead, as well as a prayer for our life’s journey. It is a prayer that reminds us and calls us to service and vocation, and it opens our faith, our hearts and our minds to a vision of the new and unknown paths and even perils that each one of us are blessed with...*not cursed with* but blessed with. The prayer is this:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In this prayer we are recognizing that we are called to ventures we cannot see how they are going to turn out, ventures that no one has done before, and ventures with serious and immediate danger and difficulties. We are NOT praying for God to spare us from this; we praying for God to direct us to these ventures and guide us through them. As we listen to this prayer again, consider the words of the imprisoned apostles in the Acts of the Apostles that were flogged and beaten for their “disobedience” when they proclaimed the Gospel after the Sanhedrin imprisoned them and ordered them to never preach the Gospel. What is meant by preaching the Gospel is teaching about Jesus Christ...Luke writes this in the Acts of the Apostles:

They (the Sanhedrin) called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴²Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. (Acts 5:39b-42)

Listen again to the prayer:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

At this point you may be asking, what does any of this have to do with the woman at the well? I mention all of this because within verse four, just before our Gospel lesson begins, we hear John set up this encounter at the well by saying this:

⁴Now he (Jesus) had to go through Samaria. (John 4:4)

There is a little more to this comment when we look at the Greek. What this says in the Greek is this:

it is necessary he himself *pass-through* (*διέρχομαι*) on account of Samaria.

This word *διέρχομαι* or “pass-through” in the context of John’s Gospel is usually associated with

God's plan indicating that this encounter is one of those "unknown" ventures that God's hand is in. Geographically, Jesus did not really have to "pass through" the Samaritan city of Sychar, his journey would have been much safer for a Jew like Himself had he had taken the route other Jews typically take. Despite the hostility Jews felt towards Samaritans, Jesus chose to walk through their land in a time when Jews traveling between Galilee and Judea would avoid going through Samaria by crossing to the eastern side of the Jordan River, adding about three days to the journey. And we learn then in this encounter with this Samaritan woman that this journey was not about geography or the convenience of a quicker shorter route at all...this journey through Sychar was all about theology, calling us to look deeper into this meeting at the well with this Samaritan woman and Jesus.

Last week in our Gospel lesson we heard about the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the cover of darkness and questions Jesus about faith and the Holy Spirit, along with the Kingdom of God and how to get there. And at the end of the encounter, we heard that very well-known passage from the Gospel according to John:

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish. (John 3:16)

For those who love to resort to the acronym, WWJD what would Jesus do?...here is what Jesus does, did, and continues to do...He loves us and dies for us. Now, when one wants to assume the role of Jesus by asking what would Jesus do when judging others, here is what Jesus did...He loved us and others and died for us and others...now can you do that because that IS what Jesus does?! For those who loved to hold the signs up all over the place that read, "John 3:16" I ask, what does that mean? Does this simple passage from John's Gospel mean that God loved me so much that I am now able to hold up a big and obnoxious sign to show off a Bible passage, or that I know something "they" don't? Is this really what this passage is about? Is this really what Jesus would do? Think about this, the sign only speaks to those who already know the passage and for the most part, those who already know about God's love...it says nothing to those who do not know God's Word.

So, what does it mean that God so love the world? This is why Jesus went through Sychar and this is the meaning of this encounter with this woman...because God so loved the world. Last week a very pious Sanhedrin Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus approached Jesus under the veil of darkness. Now today in this Gospel lesson, we have an unnamed Samaritan woman who has had five husbands and is currently living with a man who is not her husband and meeting up with Jesus in the middle of the day for all to see at a very public place...very scandalous...and at that time, something Jesus shouldn't do. However, the dynamic of this scene between this unnamed woman and Jesus is very lost to the modern reader, especially for us sitting here today.

The relationship between Samaritans and Jews is characterized by centuries of deep-rooted animosity, theological rivalry, and claims of broken ancestry, originating from the 8th-century BC. This isn't the Hatfields and the McCoys, it is much deeper than anything that we have experienced. Jews viewed Samaritans as a bunch of mixed-race heretics. But here stands Jesus, a Jew, with a woman, a Samaritan woman with a reputation, the worst kind of Samaritan, this is beyond scandalous.

But this is what Jesus does. In this meeting, Jesus is showing us, showing this woman, showing the astonished disciples who returned from getting food, and showing anyone else who may have witnessed this encounter that God loves the world...the whole world and that love is not confined by our social-mortal-earthly boundaries, opinions, or constraints. Jesus is showing all that God's love breaks the boundaries between the "chosen" people and "rejected" people, breaks the boundaries between the pious and the assumed "un-pious", breaks the boundaries between male and female.

Today on his journey from Judea to Galilee, Jesus passed through Samaria, stopping at Jacob's well in the city of Sychar around noon, tired and thirsty. It is in this encounter we see that God so loved the world that this love breaks all social barriers, and Jesus does this by simply asking a Samaritan woman for water. And from the exchange between this woman and Jesus, he offers her "living water," and reveals his identity as the Messiah which is something that Jesus doesn't frequently do so plainly in this Gospel. This term "living water" is like the term we heard last week in the Gospel when Jesus talked about being born again or from above...did it mean from above or again? This week Jesus talks about "living water" meaning either fresh running water from a stream or well, or the life-giving water of redemption, the living water of mercy and forgiveness. It's obvious that the woman received the living water of redemption and mercy because we hear in verses 28 & 29 that,

²⁸ (...) the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, (other Samaritans) ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

For God so loved the world that He gave us His Son to worship and to be in his presence in that worship just as the woman does at the well, but do we worship in Spirit and truth or do we just gather to feel better about ourselves? Listen again to what John says here in this encounter:

²³ But the hour ... 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."

Today in this gathering in this very public place Jesus is present and speaking to us in the proclamation of this Word and in the elements of this very Holy Meal. It is not a public well that we meet at in the heat of the day, we meet today in a glorious public setting in a very comfortable climate and we hear once again that God loves us, and that love gathers us, that love forgives us, that love teaches us, feeds us, nurtures us and that love sends us. We are all sent in that love God has given to the world. But here is the Good News for us that is being presented to us in this encounter at the well. True worship is not what we do, but what God does. True worship is a product or a response to that presence of Christ within Word and in Sacrament and what we do when we are sent. Whenever the spirit of Christ reaches in, speaks to us, comes next to us, instructs us, then that is truly worship "in spirit and in truth." But is that all there is to it?

I believe that too often church worship is good order set in pleasant hospitality. We seem to think that church is where we come to have peace and stability, good order and decorum, that focuses on ourselves and keeping everything nice, predictable, and all done with a smile on our face, no

matter what goes on in the world. And we then leave all this intention locked safely in this building along with our faith. But we have all been washed in the "living water," the water of our Baptism that refreshes and empowers us so that we can venture forth to be living water or spirit and truth out there!...out there...where we don't just hold up an ambiguous sign that means nothing to the people it is intended for.

This Samaritan woman is more of a disciple than the disciples in this Gospel lesson that is before us today...the disciples leave his presence to go shopping for food, but the woman leaves the encounter with Jesus, just like we do every week, but listen to what she does:

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.

And listen again to what happens when she *TELLS the others*, or when she *SHARES with the others* all that she experienced when she was with Jesus:

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."

For God so loved the world and today we too have encountered this love in Jesus Christ just like the woman at the well. We too have experienced his presence in the grace and mercy of his Word and the salvation that is in this very meal of bread and wine. May we too go in good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that the Good News of Jesus Christ is leading us and God's love supporting us. We know that we will encounter ventures of which we cannot see the ending, we will travel by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown, but this is where God's love has called us to share the faith and grace that we have been blessed with in his presence and may that faith and grace lift those who hear and experience so that as faith and grace is extended to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen