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Matthew 4:1-11

Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalm 121

Romans 4:1-5,13-17

March 12, 2023

The Third Sunday in Lent

What are you thirsty for?

I asked this question three years ago on the third Sunday in Lent. How many of you remember what happened on this particular Sunday three years ago? It was our first Sunday of COVID shut down. It was the first Sunday we closed our doors. And my sermon was mailed out to the congregation the old-fashioned way...with a stamp.

It was a shift in our perspective and in our way of life. A shift that was only just starting but we could feel the repercussions gradually growing all around us. And so, that week, as we read the Gospel story of the Samaritan woman at the well, as Jesus asks her for a drink of water, I asked all of you...what are you thirsty for? The answers, then and now, are surely a lot deeper than just a drink of water. Luckily, our Gospel story is a lot deeper than just a well.

The question...what are you thirsty for...is a beautiful investigation into something deep within ourselves that longs for nourishment. It gives us a chance to reflect on the parts of ourselves that are parched and craving connection.

3 years ago, we were thirsty for reassurance...from doctors and politicians, from our community leaders and employers. Our children were thirsty for school and friends and sporting events.

As I look back on the past three years of thirst, I am wondering how are we doing? Did the past three years help us find new ways to satiate our thirst for love, connection, and care? How have we responded to the thirst of others? Have we found more compassion in our hearts, more openness to generosity and kindness? Or have we built walls to protect our water sources just in case we fall back into times of scarcity?

What are you thirsty for?

When Jesus meets the woman at the well, they are both faced with this same question. It's a fascinating moment.

Because in this one story there are so many obstacles to overcome, obstacles that we put up between ourselves every single day. Obstacles that deny us opportunities for connection and compassion, to relieve our thirst.

Consider the scene.

⁵[Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷A 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.)⁹The 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.)

What are the first things that stand out to you? What obstacles do Jesus and the woman face?

The first thing I notice is that a man is talking to a woman. They are alone and they are strangers. I also notice that Jesus is a Jewish rabbi. The woman is a Samaritan.

And then we learn this a few verses later:

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

From that we learn that the woman had been married multiple times. And if you look closely, you will also notice that Jesus doesn't make a judgement about her marital history. He just confirms that she has told the truth.

As we read on...we find out that the woman has a whole lot to say. She's very chatty. She asks questions. She engages Jesus in conversation. Not necessarily a socially acceptable thing for a woman out alone at that point in time.

Every aspect of this story stands as an obstacle to connection. A man in Jesus' day would not have been alone with a woman in conversation, especially a stranger. And, it would not have been typical that a Jew, a rabbi at that, would be associating with a Samaritan. Her multiple marriages also didn't put her in a good social standing and she certainly didn't converse with Jesus in discreet ways. She was direct and unapologetic.

Jesus and the woman have so many reasons to turn away from one another and yet in their thirst, something beautiful happens. Grace begins to emerge. Barriers of gender, ethnicity, social norms, religious standards and political perspectives never come into play. We don't hear Jesus or the woman make assumption about the other. They aren't discriminating based upon who they are or where they are from. We simply hear a story of connection. Connection that rises above any preconceived ideas of socially acceptable society.

How do they do this? They spend time together. They listen and learn from one another. They ask one another for help. They give and the receive. They build trust.

Let me leave you with a quote from Brother Aloise, a monastic at the Taize community in France. He wrote, *"When we know we are loved or when we love, when we experience bonds of friendship, or when the beauty of creation or human creativity touches us, it strikes us that life is indeed beautiful. These moments can take us by surprise; they may arise even in a period of suffering, like a light that comes from elsewhere. In them we see, in simplicity, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives."*

Aren't we all thirsty for that kind of connection? The kind of connection that surprises us and shows us that the world is truly a beautiful place filled with people who love you and care for you. That is living water. The presence of God in each and every one of our hearts...given and received. Shared and Blessed.

Amen.