

## Social Distances

[John 4:5-42](#)

I'm sorry I'm not worshiping with you in person this morning though I am participating through livestream. I am not there because I have a very minor chest cold which in normal circumstances I would completely disregard. But these are not normal circumstances. So I am practicing "social distancing" by staying home and I am very grateful to the Rev Susan for stepping in for me.

Yesterday the first instance of the coronavirus was confirmed in this county and so together we must change our behaviors in order to reduce the rapid spread of the virus.

I imagine that many of you have been to the grocery store in the last few days and seen people buying more than they need and apparently stock-piling things that they consider to be necessities. It reminds me of the parable of the wise and not-so-wise bridesmaids who were meant to stay up to wait for the bridegroom but some of them failed to take extra oil and so their lamps went out. I imagine that if Jesus were telling that story today he might compare those bridesmaids who had enough oil with those who lugged ten gallon containers with them, just in case.

There is a fine line between being prepared, and grabbing as much as I can get for me out of fear that there will not be enough. There is a fine line between taking sensible precautions and allowing oneself to be caught up in moral panic.

Moral panics are social phenomena which happen when a society experiences a threat and seizes on a particular cause which does not actually have anything to do with it, and then attacks that perceived cause. Most often it is a group of people who are seen as a threat and then scapegoated. In medieval times when there were mysterious epidemics and thousands were dying, it was believed that Jews were poisoning the water. That of course led to lynchings and persecutions. In our situation today it would be easy for the divisiveness that is already endemic in our national culture to turn into a moral panic where we turn on some group with hatred, and accuse them of causing our problem. As though closing our borders or routing out undocumented workers might reduce the spread of the virus.

As you know, during the time of Jesus, Samaritans were looked down on. They were a lesser race, a lesser class. Usually Jews did not mix with Samaritans and men did not mix with women outside the home. But in today's gospel, Jesus has a lengthy conversation with someone who is both a woman and a Samaritan. In case we are in any doubt of how surprising this was, the woman herself asks, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

Yet Jesus is totally unphased. He is willing to break with social convention. In fact. It almost seems as though he planned this meeting – why else would he sit by the well hot and thirsty and let all his disciples go off into town without first drawing any water for him?

It is also surprising that the woman, let's call her Simone, that Simone was there in the middle of the day. Why hadn't she gotten all her water in the early morning like the other women? Perhaps she hadn't got enough then, or perhaps she spilled it, or perhaps there was a reason she didn't want to be there at the same time as the other women. We don't know. But we can be sure that making the trek to the well and back carrying heavy water in the heat of the Mediterranean sun was not Simone's first choice.

But it was in that place, where she didn't want to be, that she met Jesus. Jesus was waiting for her when she went to do the necessary but inconvenient task of getting water. I can imagine that Simone was initially annoyed to find this man waiting there. But soon her annoyance turns to hope as he talks about living water. And she takes him literally – imagine having water that just comes out of a rock in your own home – like having an eternal spring right there in your own kitchen.

But Jesus wasn't talking about interior plumbing, he was talking about internal watering.

Stef Shuman shared an image with me last week. She said that she was running water into her hand basin, and as fast as the water came in from the faucet, it ran out the drain, so it was constantly being renewed but the level of water in the basin remained the same. This is how it is with the life-giving water that Jesus describes. It is constantly flowing, it is constantly flowing in us and through us, and it never runs dry, the level never changes.

This is grace, just like being born again. It is grace that comes from trusting in Jesus and in the good news of the kin-dom that he brings. It is grace that comes from receiving God's gift and seeing things with God's eyes. From that perspective we are all beloved children of God. From that perspective there is no lack – Jesus was sustained primarily not by food but by his connection with God and living with that connection first and foremost in his life. That is the living hope which is in Jesus and which bring us joy and confidence regardless of what happens.

I am reminded of Thomas Merton's vision, of which he wrote, "There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun. ...it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes."

This is where the living water flows. This is our core as members of the Body of Christ. And in the core of our reality where we are connected with God, marked as Christ's own forever, there need be no fear. We need not fear illness, we need not fear those who are different from us because we are held secure in the everlasting arms.

And so, in this time of pandemic, we are being asked for a time of sacrifice. A time when we will not do many things that we would normally do. A time when we stay home when we would rather go out, and when we bow to those we love instead of hugging them. A time when we refrain from using the common cup. A time when the homily comes by video. Perhaps even a time when we do not meet in person.

But that does not change who we are. We are still members of the Body of Christ. We are still followers of Jesus. We are still walking around shining like the sun, embraced by unconditional love. So the changes in our behavior come from love not from fear. Let us not slip into blaming or judging. Let us not get gripped by panic buying or by moral panic.

Let us not allow ourselves to get gripped by fear. Even when the stock market crashes, even when the leaders of the world are in disarray, even when we can't buy toilet paper, God's love embraces and lifts us up and the water of life flows in us and through us to our neighbors and to the parched places of the world.

It is because of love that we practice social distancing. It is because of love that we take care of ourselves. It is because of love that we pray for one another and for all those affected by the virus.

My prayer for all of us is that especially in these difficult times, we may be filled to overflowing with the water of life, the love of God.