

BEACHBURG PASTORAL CHARGE Worship Service, August 8th, 2021

Welcome

Good morning. I welcome you once again to the water's edge of Golden Lake. I am so fortunate that in 1955 my father made the decision to purchase this little slice of heaven, although at the time it was more swamp than serenity but that choice has had such an impact on me and my family over the years.

This past week on our local radio MyFM they honoured some woman of influence in our community (the recipients can be found on the Pembroke today website www.pembroketoday.ca) whose decisions have impacted us. So when I was deciding on today's scripture the story of the woman at the well seemed appropriate, as by seizing the opportunity to drink of the living water her actions have influenced us in our faith. So let us come together in worship. Let us pray.

Opening Prayer

O God, we gather at your waters,
as a hot and bothered crowd gathers on the beach
on a sweltering, summer day.

O God, we drink at your fountain, as a parched dog laps at the fresh,
running water of a mountain stream.

O God, we await your refreshment,
as a tired worker watches the clock for their shift to end.
Quench our thirst, satisfy our longings.

May we be refreshed and restored in you;
and teach us where to find the bucket and how to carry it
so that we might draw that water for those who most need it.

Song

So let us begin today's service with a song performed by Keith and Kristen Getty entitled "Living Waters"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LA9UFBEHciY>

Scripture

John 4:5-42

⁵So he (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.) ¹⁰Jesus 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." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but 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." ¹⁵The 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." 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!" ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But 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.

²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷Just 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?" ²⁸Then 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?" ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³

³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They 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."

Meditation

Thirsting for More

The story of the woman at the well is familiar to most churchgoers. and since stories with women at the center don't happen very often in our scripture, I think it is important to look at this important historical figure who has influenced our faith.

Now if you have ever experienced a Baptism that I have presided over, you know that this scripture is one of my favourites as water is the obvious symbol in our text today. But perhaps another important theme in this passage is opportunity. Remember that word - opportunity.

The Samaritan woman, the woman at the well in our Gospel reading, had a once in a life time opportunity. When it comes to seizing the opportunity, I begin with the following story;

Eleven souls, ten men and one woman, so the story goes, dangled from a rope beneath a helicopter, during a rescue attempt. Word came down from the pilot that their combined weight was too much. One of the eleven would have to let go. If not, they would all perish. It was the woman who spoke up. She said her whole life had been one

sacrifice after another—for her children, for her husband, for her parents. And now she was willing to sacrifice this one last time, by letting go. With that, the ten men applauded! The point? Never underestimate the power of a woman to seize the opportunity!

We all have the power to use opportunities that come our way. Each day we have the opportunity to look at our lives and our relationships, and to lay them open to the nourishing, healing presence of Christ.

It doesn't take much to set the scene for this story from John's Gospel. We have all been there. It was a boring little town, Sychar, with not much happening. The women got together for a visit after supper, or perhaps before breakfast. That was their reward, of course, graciously given by their husbands, for looking after the kids, washing the clothes, making their meatloaf, and the hundred and one other things that women did back in those days.

The men congregated at the local blacksmith's shop, or around the entrance to the carpenter's workshop. They talked wool, wood and women.

It may have been a boring town, but it was a friendly little

place, just the kind of spot the people leaving the big cities would like to settle in, raise a few chickens, know all your neighbours by their first names, (and by their problems), and have a real sense of belonging.

But wait minute. If it was such a friendly place, what was this woman doing out at noon, all by herself, drawing water. The cool of morning or evening was the time for that chore. Never in the heat of the day. We find out later that for some reason she was not so welcome in this boring, but friendly little town. She was avoided by the other women, and probably talked about by the men.

Lots of theories, but nobody knows for sure - just a hint that she might have been the local swinger - five husbands and a current live-in lover. No wonder the other women shunned this woman who had been divorced five times.

No evidence for that of course. It could just as well have been that her various husbands had all died. It happens. In a way it is insignificant, except it shows how we devalue women, and let our imaginations' run wild. We do the same thing with Mary Magdalene's character. There is absolutely no evidence that Mary Magdalene was a so called "loose woman." Anyway, you get the picture of this developing

scene at the well.

Fred Craddock, great preacher and story teller, says,

the woman's life is trapped in a non-satisfying, non-fulfilling cycle of filling and emptying water jars ... But whether life's little rituals be religious or secular, at the altar or the town well, they are no substitute for knowing God.

You know the little rituals: changing diapers, cooking meals, going to the same uninspiring job each day, trapped in a boring circle of friends, or isolated in a life with few friends, your life running down and out, the years ticking off like the hours used to, feeling emptier and emptier, and like the woman at the well, desperately thirsting for more.

Jesus tantalizes her with the water, water as his gift. She is sucked in and wants that water. "Please sir, give me that water, so that I will never be thirsty again."

Jesus, realizing that a spiritual experience is better when shared with someone, says, "Go and call your husband." The woman, with squirming honesty says, "I am not married."

Herb O'Driscoll in his book, "Encountering Jesus as Lord" says,

She is aware that conversational intimacy leads to self-revelation, and she has things to hide. So have we all. All paths in search of the holy, involve some measure of confession, some revelation.

Sooner or later all encounters with our Lord involve some measure of self-revelation even if only to ourselves.

Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well shows us that if we are thirsting for more, spiritually, then we have to go deeper and face some things about ourselves.

The woman did and didn't want to go deeper. She does a very human thing when Jesus tries to get her to go deeper. She changes the subject. (You've probably done that yourself.) Try to get too close to some people, and they will change the subject on you every single time. I know that I am better at that than most people.

Changing the subject, she brings up a remote issue that had been festering for generations among her people. Samaritans had inter married with other races, lowering

their worship standards. Their dishes and utensils were unclean. Jewish religion had rules about dishes, (although I don't think they would have went as far as spraying their Tim Horton's coffee cup with disinfectant as I read of one man who did so when this pandemic started.)

Samaritans believed that God was to be worshipped on a mountain. The Jews said God was to be worshipped in Jerusalem. Jesus deflects her diversion with a comment that has profoundly affected religion ever since: "God is spirit," he said, "God is Spirit, and God is to be worshipped, not on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and in truth."

The woman persists trying to divert Jesus with a question about who is the Messiah. As Pastor Herb O'Driscoll says,

Jesus doesn't allow her an escape. He says to her what he says to all of us who encounter him at all our noon-hour wells. He says, "I who speak to you am he." Each of us has to decide what our response to that is to be.

The woman decides. In a most surprising development, she leaves her water jar at the well, goes back to the village and gathers the people. She's had an experience that was far

more important than the water she came to the well for. She needs to tell people what had happened to her. She becomes a missionary and talks to others.

But here we find another significant twist to this story. On the surface, there is no evidence that she totally believed in Jesus. Her comment to the people is not a statement of faith, but a question, "Can this be the Christ?" I don't know. Can he be?

I find this is a very important detail, one that gives us great hope for our lives. She isn't sure exactly who Jesus is, but that doesn't stop her from telling others about him. We are all aware of the gaps in our own belief system. We are aware of what we don't know, and at times are not sure what we believe. In spite of that, we still let our lives witness to the truth and the love that we have experienced from God. And we thirst for more.

We don't wait to cook our first meal or bake our first pie until we know all about cooking. We don't wait till we can play all the scales correctly before we entertain others with a musical instrument. We learn by doing, as the woman at the well does. And look what happens.

The whole village believes this shunned, nameless woman, whose life is so dry that whether she knew it or not she thirsted for something more. The whole village goes out to meet Jesus, begging him to stay with them, with the result that many are drawn to this new faith.

Many come back and tell the woman, "We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world."

That's the end of her story ... but not the end our ours. God meets us at our noon-hour wells, or our local watering holes. God offers us opportunities to go deeper spiritually, and mentally each and every day.

Something that makes this story a great story is the movement in it. No one stays still, either mentally, physically, or spiritually. Read it over again and pay attention to how everyone is moving from somewhere to somewhere else. Something we can relate to as we now are able to move about once again.

And shortly we will gather again as church. And We will come to church from all over the place, but not just from

our homes scattered throughout the area. We will come from all over the place in terms of our ideas, personalities, life styles, wants, needs, goals, and our thirst for more.

We will drink of life giving water that Jesus offers. I long for the time when we will once again share it with one another in conversations afterwards. Then we shall take it out to the villages and towns, and share it with others. And they will share with us, their living water.

That is exciting enough to make us, even though we are not meeting in person today, to never give up thirsting for more. Thanks Be To God.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Holy God,
whose Spirit moved over the waters at the dawn of creation,
hear our prayers for all who thirst today.

We pray for those who are spiritually thirsty,
who long to know Your presence, but don't know where to find You.
We pray for those who are alone and without hope,
those who long to feel needed and loved,
those who are searching for meaning and purpose.

Lord, may Your healing waters,
pour down upon us, and heal your people.

We pray for all who are physically thirsty,
who don't have enough water to drink, or feed for their animals,
whose fields are parched, whose crops have withered;

those who have to walk long distances to find enough water to survive,
or who have to be content with water that is unclean.
We pray for those whose homes and villages are torn apart because of drought or famine or are in danger from runaway wildfires.

Lord, may Your healing waters, pour down upon us, and heal your people.

We pray for those who are thirsty for justice, who long for an equal sharing of resources among peoples and nations; those who put their lives at risk to protect streams and rivers and oceans; those who are working to find clean water, and make it available to those who need it.

Lord, may Your healing waters pour down upon us, and heal your people.

God, we ask that you would open our hearts to the needs of all who thirst.

Give us courage to work together for justice, to stand alongside those who are thirsty, so that all people, everywhere, may live without want or fear, and may discover the opportunity of abundant life that You promise to each one.

In the name of Jesus Christ—the source of living water—we pray in the words that he taught us. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Song. I leave you now with our closing song “Living Water” performed by group Gateway Worship.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kCISDuPN8E>

And now may God: meet you at the well to quench your thirsty heart,
with the drink of grace that brings new life. Until we meet again.