

Exodus 17:1-7
John 4:5-27
March 15, 2020

WATER OF LOVE

- I. It was high noon. They came with needs. The man came tired and thirsty from a long journey on foot. The woman came to draw water for her daily use. **IMPORTANT HUMAN NEEDS BROUGHT THEM THERE.**
 - A. **THIS IS STORY ABOUT SOCIAL DISTANCING.** We know that term as a voluntary means to slow the transmission of COVID-19, 3' away from everyone. Again, in our present situation it is voluntary, a way to practice care for our community. Physical needs are hard to ignore...thirst chief among them...and it was this basic need that overrode social distancing.
 1. What was it for the woman, this social distancing? And what was it for Jesus?
 2. Woman's methodical routine was to arrive at high noon at Jacob's Well...yes, she needed water for her household. Jesus' need was for water as well---as a traveler who was parched.
 3. **THE NEED IS REAL, HUMAN, AND TEMPORARY. AND IT CAN BE MOMENTARILY FILLED.**
 - B. On the part of the woman, there is an additional need as well. May be unconscious, but no less real: for **spiritual and emotional contact.**
- II. The woman at the well is experiencing social distancing, and it is not voluntary. Her community has ostracized her. This is not explicitly stated, but the clues are everywhere in the story.

- A. Women in the time of Jesus gathered at their water source in the early morning or in the cool of the evening.
 - 1. Without the noon heat, the heavy water jars were easier to carry back and forth to their homes.
 - 2. It was also a social time for the women because they talk without the men and gather the latest info about the town...
 - B. This woman was at the well at noon. No one else was around---social distance. Clearly, she would have preferred to be there and participate as part of the community.
- III. The first social distancing that we see in the passage comes on quickly. Jews and Samaritans. Two people. Disciples gone. So Jesus is sitting by the well, clearly has no means of obtaining water from the well when the woman arrives and the first words out of his mouth are: "Give me a drink."
- A. Clearly, the woman is taken aback: wonder how long it has been since a person has spoken to her, other than the man who lives with her.
 - B. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" Then by way of explanation, the gospel writer : (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Greek: Use dishes in common. A very stark word---we worship on this mountain but you say Jerusalem... WOMAN, SAMARIA.SEPARATION. Where there should be separation there is conversation.
 - C. Sure, it's good to proud of one's heritage, and it can be good for one's self-esteem at the expense of another.
- IV. So Jesus sensed that there wassomething out of kilter from her arrival at the well alone and at noon. "Go, call your husband." Here is the second social distancing in this passage and one that plagued her life.
- A. She's over the limit on husbands (Hebrews were limited to three). And she was living with a man to whom she was not married. Much conjecture about the woman, but what we do know is that she was outside the boundary of what a community deemed to be righteous.

B. At very end of the passage, the disciples arrive from their shopping expedition and we're told that "they were astonished that he was talking to a woman..." That's because righteous men and women did not speak to one another unless they knew one another.

1. Speaking to a woman, and what's more, a Samaritan. And a woman who her own community found to be unsavory and therefore someone to be shunned.
2. The woman does something very risky; she reveals her selfhood to a man who, in her words, told her everything she had ever done.
3. But Jesus, the water that wells up to eternal life, the water of love, also met her where she was and he offered up who he was. Not incidentally, it is to this woman from Samaria that he explicitly declares that he is the Messiah.

V. During a pandemic, social distancing is a good practice. When times are good, however, we need to be aware of the social distancing that lots of us practice unconsciously.

A. Jesus' acknowledgement of the Samaritan woman's true selfhood was the water of life for her. It was like water in the desert, causing her to go out into a community that had snubbed and invited them to come see Jesus.

B. A couple of weeks ago, Judy and I took a mid-week trip to Big Bend. Because it was quite cold on one the days we were there, we hiked on the desert floor. The first hike was to Mule Ears spring, a true desert hike over small hills of sand, rock, and gravel. After two and a half miles, we turned a corner and there we saw brilliant, vibrant green. Plants of many varieties were tangled together at the spring, along with a few desert critters. A tiny trace of rain must had fallen over night, because on our way back to the trailhead the ocotillo, a scraggly looking desert cactus of with long, whip-like shoots was popping out bright red blossoms on the very tips thorny arms. It's amazing what a little water can do in a parched land.

- C. At Jacob's Well, the Samaritan woman knew that only God's representative, the Messiah, held the answer to her search for LOVE.

Social distancing will help slow the spread of the virus, and as people of faith who are concerned for the common good, it is definitely a best practice. Recently, a rabbi, responding to his synagogue's measures to help curtail the spread of the virus put it squarely before us:

Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise.

WE ARE RECEIVERS OF THE WATER OF LOVE; BUT WE ARE ALSO DISPENSERS OF THE WATER OF LOVE.