The Third Sunday in Lent, March 15 2020, the Rev. Karen Swanson

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-52

May God speak through my words and your reflections that in our spiritual thirst we may know Jesus as a fresh spring of water that will flow in us, and between us, and re-vitalize our relationship with God.

How strange it is to prepare this sermon, knowing that I will be preaching it to an empty church, and that you will be reading it or hearing it on line in small family groups or alone! I will miss your sometimes verbal and sometime nonverbal response to what I say as I try to make sense of both the Scriptures and our current situations. I learn from these interactions with you, and will miss them. I will also miss greeting you, praying with you for our community’s concerns, and together receiving nourishment from the sacrament of Holy Eucharist.

The corona virus, and our growing awareness of its current and possible future impact on us, dominates the news. Usually Father David is the news junkie in our family, but now I am too. I want to know the latest. I want to understand.

Each of us is affected differently by the virus. The youngest among us are perhaps delighted to be at home with Mom or Dad or grandparents instead of being at preschool or daycare. Parents among us are madly juggling both jobs and caring for children. Our youth are out of school. Many are enjoying the chance to kick back and perhaps play video games, while others are already missing their interactions with friends, classmates and teachers. The most vulnerable among us are carefully protecting themselves by hunkering down in their homes. Some wonder if their jobs will remain viable, while others worry about their financial security as the stock market swings up and mostly down. These are challenging times.

Sometimes all the changes are simply overwhelming, and I sit quietly in my overstuffed chair and just try to absorb it all. I wonder, what does it mean to be a Christian at this time? Because each of us are impacted by the virus differently, our answers will also be unique. At the same time, because of our shared faith, other of our responses will be the same.

Now is a time of prayer. It is a time to pray for one another’s continued health and well-being. It is a time to pray for leaders in public health, in government and in economics that they will guide us in wise ways. It is time to pray for those throughout the world who are ill. The prayer of the faithful is powerful in its effects.

Now is also a time to remember and give thanks for the many ways in which God has strengthened us and blessed us in the past. In today’s reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Israelites in the desert complain to Moses and God because they have no water. Although this is surely an understandable complaint, the Israelites are later chided to remember who God is, and what God has done for them. They can trust God to provide them with life-giving water because God set them free from grueling slavery in Egypt, led them into freedom through the Red Sea, and provided manna and quail for them to eat.

 And us? We can count on God to provide the life-giving water of spiritual nurture because He sent Jesus to earth to be with us, and raised Him from the dead so that we might all enjoy new life. In addition, God has been present in our personal lives. We have known Him in various ways: in the birth of a child; in God-given insights; in profound experiences of God’s love and forgiveness; in the helping hand of another when we needed it most. God has been with us, is with us, and will be with us again and again because this is who God is. God loves us. In challenging times, we need to remember who God is, and what He has done for us.

The lesson from Romans reminds us that we have been made right with God by trusting Him, not by our own good deeds. Our actions, good or bad, have not and do not earn us a place in God’s kingdom. We are part of the community of God’s children because we know our need for God and for God’s forgiveness, and we turn and re-turn to him again and again. It is important that we remember this too: it is God who makes us worthy of God’s companionship.

Last, but not least, now is also a time for us to find ways to care for others, and to share with them. In response to God’s great love for us, this is always our call. How can we, in response to God’s love, love our neighbors as we love ourselves? We love ourselves by keeping ourselves safe. From this place of safety, how can we love others? How can we help? It will be different for all of us. Perhaps it will entail sending e-mails, writing letters, calling others. Perhaps it will mean picking up groceries for a vulnerable neighbor. Perhaps it will mean simplifying our lives so that we have more to share. Perhaps it will mean using our education and wisdom to help find solutions to the challenge. It might even involve composing a song, writing a poem, or learning to tell a cheering joke. God will hear your prayer, and show you the way, just as He will for me.

Thank you, God, that we know Jesus as a spring of fresh water flowing among us and between God and us, deepening our relationships, and reminding us that are, His beloved children. Amen.

**The Collect**

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Exodus 17:1-7**

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested theLord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

**The Response**

**Psalm 95**

***Venite, exultemus***

1 Come, let us sing to the Lord; \*
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.

2 Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving \*
and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.

3 For the Lord is a great God, \*
and a great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the caverns of the earth, \*
and the heights of the hills are his also.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, \*
and his hands have molded the dry land.

6 Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, \*
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. \*
Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

8 Harden not your hearts,
as your forebears did in the wilderness, \*
at Meribah, and on that day at Massah,
when they tempted me.

9 They put me to the test, \*
though they had seen my works.

10 Forty years long I detested that generation and said, \*
"This people are wayward in their hearts;
they do not know my ways."

11 So I swore in my wrath, \*
"They shall not enter into my rest."

**The Epistle**

**Romans 5:1-11**

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

**The Gospel**

**John 4:5-42**

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

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The 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.) Jesus 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.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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.” The 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.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” 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.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Just 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?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

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