

Sunday, March 29, 2020 "Sunday Musings"

The following is an outline of worship for Sunday...

Scripture: John 4: 5-42; Philippians 3:12-4:1

Let us pray: *Gracious God, who created us in God's own image, we are grateful for all that you have done for us, for all that you are doing in us, and for all that you will do through us. Open our eyes to see your presence among us, moving in powerful ways at all times and in all places. Open our ears to hear familiar words in new ways—ways that will change us and challenge us to become the people you created us to be. Grant us the power and the courage to come out of the darkness and into the light of Jesus Christ, that we may serve you by serving others. We love you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Amen.*

A few thoughts on the scripture passage: The scripture is only grist for our thought and eventual discussion. Jesus comes to a well and is thirsty. We have all been thirsty at one time or another. Maybe we can recall. There were days when I spent ten hours at a tie on a tennis court. The humidity was sometimes so high that you perspired just waiting for the next point. There were several ins when a can of soda seemed like an oasis in the desert. Or I can remember when I had a colonoscopy. For those of you who have not had the pleasure, the doctor inserts a tube with a camera into your rear end and up into your intestine. The camera detects polyps which may be pre-cancers. For the procedure they administer some anesthesia, which makes you feel groggy, loopy, dopey, out of it...and very, very good. When you recover from the anesthetics, they allow you to take a cup of apple juice. For some reason that cup of apple juice is delicious. Perhaps the anesthesia makes you thirsty and parched.

But thirst was brought home to me by Harris, my inherited dog. Some time ago he began to demonstrate strange symptoms. He would not hold his urine for the entire evening. So we would awake to find a large puddle in the middle of the kitchen, where he stayed at night. And he exhibited extreme thirst. It used to be that we would set the water bowl and food bowl down at the same time. He would ignore the water and attack the food as if he had not eaten in years. I am sure that visitors who observed him would assume that we never fed the poor dog. After he had wolfed down his food in very short order, he might pay some attention to the water. But at one point he ignored the food when it was set down. He would go straight for the water bowl and lap it all up before paying any attention to the food. And sometimes, when the bowl was depleted, he would sit next to the bowl and make strange noises in a plea for us to refill the liquid. He was thirsty. The veterinarian determined that Harris was diabetic and that we needed to give him two shots of insulin a day.

What are you thirsty for? Beyond the beverage of your choice, what do you yearn for, seek, hunger and thirst for? When are we uncomfortable, uneasy, aching until we are satisfied or fulfilled? What are we looking for in life?

The woman arrives at noon, not a good time for getting water. It is the hottest part of the day. Why did she come at the off-hour, off-peak, so to speak? Some commentators have jumped to the conclusion that she was a dishonorable woman, one who would be ashamed to show her face, one who might be the subject of whispers and gossip. They say she came at noon to avoid the stares and glances that branded her. Those commentators contend that their view is reinforced by the fact that she had five husbands. They conclude that she was promiscuous. This may be a product of sexism, which is still prevalent today. In our society men are often rewarded for conduct that women are criticized for. Men are not called sluts or whores when they have multiple partners. Men are not held to the same standards. Male news anchors can be aging; their female counterparts had better be attractive. Men are called “tough”; tough women are considered “bitchy.” Example abound. Can you think of some other inequalities in our culture?

Jesus tells her about living water that will satisfy. She answers with a dumb remark. We might recall the scripture lesson from a Sunday past. Nicodemus is told about the necessity of being born again. He responds with a stupid remark: can a man be born a second time? Can a man go back into his mother’s womb and get born again? And we wonder about those people who followed Jesus...are they all clueless? Does Jesus always speak metaphorically in language that goes over the people’s heads? Why the disconnect?

Some commentators believe it is a device used by the author of John to get his point across. Jesus begins with a statement. The listener misunderstands and takes him literally. Then Jesus goes on to expound the fuller, deeper explanation. It is a device used elsewhere in John’s gospel. The woman admits that she has been married five times. In our world of celebrity sequential marriage we might condemn the woman. But in that culture, in that time, it was men who divorced their wives. It was the man’s prerogative to ditch their mate for any imagined slight, any perceived offense, any petty cause. Women were cast off by the males. So this woman was more victim than vixen.

Jesus offered water that would satisfy. What does Jesus offer you?

When I was on jury duty, the judge asked questions of each prospective juror. There were thirty seven questions to determine conflict of interest or bias. Then there were several questions for each juror. One was: “Whom do you admire among living people today?” Most of the jurors could not think of anyone outside of a close relative, like a mother or father or sibling. One person said “Nelson Mandela.” But I wondered myself...where are the models, the examples, the mentors, the paragons of virtue and integrity, the heroes today?

Philippians suggests that we are to be exemplars of the love that we have received. We are to imitate those who are faithful. Paul wrote: “Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind. Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. Our citizenship is in heaven. Therefore, stand firm!”

Let us look for those who demonstrate faith in lifestyle and action. And let us be examples of what a mature Christian should be. What might that look like? What would it take?

I hope that you will take some time to consider the questions I have offered in this short message. And continue to pray for all those who are struggling in this time of global unease and unrest. May God bless those who are helping in this crisis, and may God speed our return to health and wellbeing. I miss you....stay well and stay connected.

Benediction: *We have encountered the living God through the love of the living Christ. We have been referred by living water. Go now to live in the hope this encounter inspires. Be "water-bearers" to a dry and parched world, knowing that the God of love and hope goes before you and with you always. Amen.*

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Peace,

Pastor Kelly, interim