

Worship Service Resources “Redemption”

Lent 3, Year A, 12th March, 2023

Romans 5:1-11 NIV / John 4:5-42 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music [*You Raise Me Up*](#) performed by Selah,

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Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn *Holy Spirit, Come With Power* 26

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: God made the earth for us, to live in and enjoy;

All: **God welcomes you into this beautiful home and asks that you help care for it.**

One: God made us a people, a community of faith;

All: **God welcomes you into the beloved community and says “You Belong.”**

One: God made you a child in the Divine Image,

All: **God welcomes you as a full participant in the kin-dom of God.**

One: God has made you, with all your gifts and beauty,

All: **Come, join in the work, share in your gifts, and know that you are welcome and beloved by God and by us.**

Invocation

God of grace and truth, we come to your house today to worship you. We bring all of ourselves to you, all of the good, the bad, and the ugly. We entrust our hidden, fearful, and fragile selves to your transforming power and gentle, loving care.

Blessing, glory, and honor are yours alone. Thank you for the many ways your Spirit breaks into our lives and into this troubled world. We offer this prayer in the name of the One whose name is above every name, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Epistle Reading Romans 5:1-11 NIV

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

perseverance, character; and character, hope.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

God: meet us at the wells where we are lonely where we are forgotten where we are hurt by others and give us to drink of the grace that brings life again God: speak to us in the trysting places where the sinners gather where the prejudices are made

known where our histories are broadcast and give us to drink of the forgiveness that brings peace again.

God: Renew all that we are and have been fill us with a new future inspire us with recreation pull us into resurrection and give us to drink from the promise of heaven. We thank you, O God, that you have given us an enduring hope—one which cannot disappoint us or mislead us. We thank you, that through our faith in you and in your Son Jesus Christ, you enter into every believing heart and make new lives that have been torn asunder by the darkness of this world...

We pray today O God that those believers who are asleep may awake and know that salvation is nearer now than when they first believed. Help them, and us, to lay aside the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light that you bestow upon those who actively seek you day by day. Grant that their faith and ours may be fully alive....

We ask today, O God, for those who have lost hope and for those who have never had it. Grant to us and to those we lift before you in our hearts a new and abiding vision of what have you have done, and what you are doing, and what you will do, to save and redeem your people and indeed the creation itself. Grant, O God, that all might see and believe and discover their purpose and the purpose of all that is and all that is yet to be....

We ask all this of you, O God, knowing that you are our hope and our salvation, a very present help in times of trouble, and the One whose purpose is to grant and new and abundant life to us and our world. Praise be to your name. **Amen.**

Hymn

Just As I Am

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Gospel Reading: John 4:5-42 NSRV

So he 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."

Message - *Redemption*

So how do you handle situations when you are faced with an interaction with someone who makes you uncomfortable? Someone who you may have been taught, whether explicitly or implicitly, to avoid? Probably someone who is quite different than yourself in some way. Do you nervously smile and say the bare minimum to be polite, looking for the first opportunity to end the encounter and move on? Or do you just avoid them completely, not making eye contact and giving them the “bum rush?” For many of us, it's something that's almost automatic, something we've been programmed to do to ensure our safety, to avoid danger.

Often that perceived threat is based on cultural or societal taboos or prejudices, reinforced by our family, friends, and the many formative social groups we're a part of growing up. Sadly, too often our ingrained sense of what is dangerous or threatening is based less on an individual's actual behavior and more on stereotypes we have been exposed to growing up. Whether it's skin color or ethnic background, expressions of sexuality and gender, physical appearance, or perceived socioeconomic status, we often classify entire groups as potentially dangerous based on either the actions of an individual fitting that profile, or simply our own imagined perception of how their uniqueness could potentially threaten us. It's certainly nothing new in the history of humankind. The same proclivity for prejudice existed in Jesus' day as well.

In our Gospel lesson, we hear the story of Jesus encountering a Samaritan woman at a well outside of the Samaritan city of Sychar. To truly understand the depth of the meaning of this encounter, it is helpful to have some background on exactly who Samaritans are, and what they represent. We hear that term a lot in the New Testament, yet most of the time we never really get a good idea of who they really are.

In Israelite history, there were originally 12 tribes founded by the 12 sons of Jacob. Those tribes divided the land of Canaan among themselves, each being responsible for a portion. The tribes of Benjamin and Judah settled in the southern portion of the land which contained the city of Jerusalem. The remaining tribes divided the northern portions. The tribes were united under the first two kings David and Solomon, but then split into two kingdoms after the death of the latter. While the southern tribes consolidated into the kingdom of Judah, and worshiped in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, the northern ten tribes consolidated into a separate kingdom with its capital in the city of Samaria, and worshiped at their own temple located on Mount Gerizim. From the beginning, there was religious tension concerning proper worship.

The Jews in Judah felt their temple in Jerusalem was the only proper sacred site to perform the rites of their faith, while the Samaritans felt Mount Gerizim was the only valid holy place for worship. As is often the case, history is written by the victors.

Eventually both kingdoms were threatened by the Assyrian empire, and while Judah capitulated and became a vassal state, the Samaritans resisted and were vanquished with

many of their people exiled and taken away as captives. The remnants of those northern people are referred to the Samaritans in Jesus' day, as well as today. While their numbers have been decimated in various times throughout history, there are still around 1900 Samaritans left today, living primarily in two enclaves in the former area of the Northern Kingdom.

As I mentioned, it was the more successful tribes of the south who then wrote the history of the two kingdoms. Unsurprisingly, the Northern Kingdom was more often portrayed as wicked and its people as unfaithful heretics. Jewish religion equated them as “unclean” like any other pagan Gentile, and they were to be avoided at all costs. Which makes this interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman so unusual and unique on many levels.

Obviously, being a Jewish rabbi, to have any unnecessary contact with a Samaritan would expose himself to being “unclean,” requiring ritual cleansing to be made whole again. And for him as a rabbi and a man addressing an unaccompanied woman would be just as scandalous in a patriarchal society. Any man, particularly a rabbi, would never converse with a woman without her spouse or one of her male relatives present. To do so would disgrace not only the man, but tempt the woman to disgrace herself by responding. So for Jesus, much like ourselves when confronted by the maligned “other” in our own contexts, there were many “red flags” that would pop up to deter any interaction for this woman. So why would Jesus initiate this exchange in our story today?

It's certainly an interesting juxtaposition from the story of his interaction with Nicodemus last week. In that story, esteemed Pharisee Nicodemus sought Jesus out in the dead of night as not to be seen, and was stymied by what he viewed as the cryptic replies Jesus gave to his scholarly inquiry. Here we have Jesus initiating contact with this outcast Samaritan woman in the middle of the day for any to see.

I use the term “outcast” not only because of her status as a Samaritan, but also what is implied by the timing of the story. The hottest part of the day is the least ideal time to be going to the well to gather water. The fact that she was going then and not in the cool morning or evening implies that she was not welcome to accompany the other women in the village when it is more advantageous to perform that task. A fact subsequently reinforced by Jesus revealing her status as one who had been married five times and was currently “living in sin” with her sixth.

Yet he shares with her a much easier metaphor for her to understand than rebirth, that of “living water” and offers her the redemption and salvation she seeks. So much so that she returns to the city and testifies to all who will listen about her encounter, and begins to understand that the man she just met may be the messiah. Her witness is so effective it motivates the rest of the town to seek Jesus out and host him for two days of further teaching. Quite the contrast from Nicodemus who goes away perplexed and unsatisfied.

So who do we reach out to? Who is the focus of our witness? Are we, like so many of Jesus' and John's day, averse to contact with those we deem as “outcast” or a “threat” because of

what stereotypical group they belong to? What would happen if we stepped past our inhibitions and reached out to someone we would usually avoid?

Perhaps our own living witness of the joy and peace of our own faith may encourage their own exploration. Maybe they might have kernels of wisdom for us that we never would have gained from staying in our own comfortable circles, among our own “proper religious authorities.” I hope we too, myself included, can take those opportunities we are presented with in the course of our daily lives to approach instead of avoid those “others” we find everywhere in the world around us, and share and learn from each other. We may find we have much less to fear and to avoid, and our own lives may be enriched all the more. May we always seek out those we meet at the wells of today. Amen.

A Call to Serve

Through Christ we are called to be sowers of God’s truth and reapers of God’s blessings. Therefore, let us joyfully share a portion of what we have received from God so those in need may rejoice with us.

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Great Provider, bless these offerings and multiply them according to your will.
May they restore hope and wholeness to those who benefit from them.
In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

Hymn *For We Are Strangers No More* **322**

Benediction

Christ has issued the welcome again: that indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Christ. The welcome mat is out, the doors are open, the light is beckoning you to enter, and to invite others. Come, experience God’s extravagant welcome and hospitality through Christ’s redeeming love. Amen.

Postlude - *Musical Interlude*