

## **Ready for Lent: Ready for Unity**

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael - March 15, 2020

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

For reflection: Psalm 95

Transcript -

Oh Lord, help us to be ready for you, ready to remember your mercy, ready to remember your love. Guide us by your Holy Spirit and grant us wisdom and understanding. That as the scriptures are read, and your Word proclaimed, may we be ready to listen, during this season of Lent. And let God's people say: Amen.

Our readings today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Exodus, chapter 17, verses 1 through 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 the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"*

Our second reading is from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 5, verses 1 through 11.

*Therefore, 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.*

Our final reading for today is from the Gospel according to John, chapter 4, verses 4 through 52.

*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.”*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This is not the sermon I intended to give this Sunday. Yes, I was going to talk about unity and overcoming division. I did not think I would be giving it from my home. I hadn't expected things to move quite so quickly. But here I am. I thought about changing this completely, finding a new topic and new scripture readings. Then I sat down to reread the chosen scriptures for today. I then realized I didn't need to change the readings or the topic. I just needed to think about it from this new perspective. It never ceases to amaze me what God will show us when we stop to ask him what it is, we should be doing. So, after some thoughtful prayer and meditation, I began to pour over the scripture readings again, thinking about what unity means to us right now, and what it means to be Ready for Unity.

There was a certain familiar panic in the reading from Exodus for today. One that felt very familiar as I was remembering pictures of empty shelves and people purchasing much more than they needed. People leaving others in a much greater need. In the Israelite worries and fears, there was a people that couldn't imagine that things would be OK if they weren't OK right now. A people ready to give up the moment things got difficult. They were without water and began to panic. I'm sure that if they'd been able to purchase bottled water, store shelves would be empty before even half had a chance to get in. So many would be so worried that they would get more than they needed. Why? Because they cannot trust that everything will be OK if we look out for each other and trust God. They were divided. They turn on Moses and think he's just marched them to their death. They are divided by fear.

I then turned my thoughts to Paul's letter to the Romans. Suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. Hope doesn't disappoint. The Israelites could have used Paul's words out in the wilderness. Paul notes that there is a bigger picture. He could just say that there is suffering, but he notes there is something more than just each individual event. Yes, things can get hard but getting through difficult times can teach us something about ourselves and about each other. Difficult times can remind us how important it is that we look out for each other and help each other, because we will all be strengthened on the other side of difficulty. Paul also points to hope. We have no reason to give up hope. We have hope in a Savior that died for us while we were still sinners to save us. We share the hope that Christ died that *all* could be saved. That *all* could find hope. Not just those that bought all the toilet paper they could find. Paul doesn't want anyone to lose sight of hope in the midst of hardship.

And then we have our Gospel reading today. John gives us the account of Jesus and the woman at the well. Jesus is left alone while the disciples go grocery shopping. He was sitting when a Samaritan woman comes to draw water. And he has the audacity to ask her for a drink. I've said this before, but it is always worth noting that Jews and Samaritans weren't supposed to mix. They were divided. That doesn't change Jesus being thirsty. It also means that this is a moment of witness where he can cross lines that people thought weren't supposed to be crossed. He offers her living water. He then goes on to say that a day is coming when the thing that divides them *won't matter* because they will be united. God seeks those who will worship in spirit and truth! The argument between temple and mountain becomes obsolete. The wall that divided is cast down and people will be united. The disciples return shocked, wondering why he would be doing this terrible thing. His reason? He's doing the will of his Father. Sure enough, the woman goes and tells others. She spreads the news. Jesus is welcomed to the community and asked to stay. And before he leaves the people now believe not because of what the women from the well had told them, but because they heard for themselves. They were united by faith. They were united in hope. Jesus easily could have moved along and not talked to them, but that isn't what he was called to do. That isn't what *we* are called to do.

These will be trying times. We all have plenty of questions. There has been plenty of information and misinformation about the Coronavirus. There has been plenty of fear. There has been plenty of panic. There has been much that might cause us to feel divided. School is being canceled. We are being told to stay home. We don't always understand why. It is easy to want to raise complaint like the Israelites in the wilderness. It is difficult because we face something that we cannot see. We face something that is an unknown. My message to you today is that we must overcome that fear. I fully agree with the recommendations to stay home right now and to avoid unnecessary outings. My message is one of hope. Will this be inconvenient? Of course! Will this make us feel isolated? Surely! Will we feel divided from those around us? YES! Can we do anything about it? *Of course*. Thing is, no matter how bad things may seem, I trust that God is going to get us through this. And we do it best when we do it together.

What can we do in the face of something that is rather unprecedented? If schools are closing and sporting events are being canceled, what possibly could we do? Plenty. First off, stay in touch. Call each other. Check in on each other. Make sure that people are doing OK. Check in on their physical health. Check in on their mental health. Check in on their spiritual health. We make sure that everyone is doing OK. We stay united in our mission to serve God. We do that best when we serve each other in love and understanding. We do it best when we stand united behind our faith, hope, and trust in

God. What can we do to show that love? Well, if you need to get something from the store, check in with those near you. Find out what others may need. Share what you have with those in need. Offer to help get things for those who can't or shouldn't go out. Donate to places that can reach the people that you cannot. Give to places that will help to care for those that are going to need extra help during this trying time. We have always been a people connected by Christ who work to serve each other. This is just another way for us to be reminded that we are united in Christ. We can still help get meals to people who need it. We can still visit when safe to do so. If you can't, guess what? There are still things you can do! Call, text, email, send a letter, Skype, Facetime, or whatever it is you do – do it! Stay connected! If there is a need in the community that you can fill, fill it! We become stronger in our unity.

I have a hope in all of this. A hope for our situation. I know that this isn't the new normal and this too will pass. However, I hope that after the dust settles and we stop socially distancing ourselves, that we come out on the other side stronger than when we started. That when we start to return to normal, that all of the good things we began to do will keep happening. That even without a virus to upend everything, that we keep checking in on people. That we keep looking in on the physical, mental, and spiritual health of the people around us. That as we find ways to help in this extreme time of trying, that we discover some simple things that are worth doing all the time. That in this time that threatens to divide us, we find a unity that will strengthen our love for each other and our love for God. That we end up a stronger people. Stronger in character. Stronger in hope. Stronger in love. Stronger in faith. Stronger together, as we stand as a people united in Christ, ready for unity. Stay safe, wash your hands, help as you can, pray as often as you can, trust God, and serve God by staying united in his grace and love. God bless you all. Amen.