

This has been a challenging week for all of us. My week began with a Synod Dean's meeting Monday in Harrisburg.

The Morning Prayer liturgy lead by a colleague included a thoughtful sermon on the gospel reading. Johnathon gave great insight to the text especially as it pertains to a society completely obsessed with hydration. Water bottles he observes seem to be everywhere. The business meeting to follow quickly included concern regarding the Coronavirus and what kinds of precautions need to be taken as pertain to faith communities.

Tuesday morning the York Conference Rostered Leaders gathered at St. Paul's in Christ Hall for our monthly meeting. During a simplified Eucharistic celebration I shared my early thoughts on the gospel text and preached on the way God often uses the most unlikely in order to proclaim the message of salvation and hope. The Samaritan woman at the well certainly fits the description of unlikely messenger. The conversation that day in the business meeting also centered on COVID-19 and the implications for congregations, our most at risk population, information provided by the CDC and a shared pastoral sense of what it is we should do, can do, will do. And what things should we refrain from for the sake of the most vulnerable. One colleague raised concerns about what if we, Deacons and Pastors, need to be isolated. What then?

Wednesday I shared openly with our Bible study group on the complexities of this rich text. We discussed many different aspects of the text; the conversation, the time of day, the importance of living water, eternal life, and the work of the disciples to be out in the fields reaping and sowing. By Wednesday evening I wasn't certain if we should have called off our community Fellowship meal and Prayer at the Close of Day. But we gathered. It wasn't as gregarious a group. Spirits were somber.

By Friday it was clear to me that we will need to make some serious decisions about our life together during these tenuous times. School districts are closing. The Governor communicated his desires as we move through these days of the Coronavirus. Emails from council members filled my in box. Phone calls and texts raised questions and sought clarification. Social distancing it seems has come to us.

The woman at the well, she understood social distancing. She came to the well to draw water at noon, in the heat of the day in order to avoid the morning and evening crowds. She lived her life on the edge of the community. Having had multiple relationships and being involved with a man who was not her husband distanced her from others who appeared to be more upright, at least on the surface. Jesus of course doesn't seem to be put off by her at all. On the contrary he engages with her. He breaks the social barriers put in place to keep her away, contained, at bay, some might even say "in her place." But that kind of social distancing was done as a way to tear down, to put asunder, to bring hardship.

The social distancing that we are currently engaging in is quite the contrary. We are keeping our distance as a way to build up, to care for, and to allow for health and wholeness. These are challenging times. They come at a time when we are anticipating spring, parish planning, and Holy Days that mark the significance of our Christian lives. We are deeply

committed to the wellness of our community and to the well-being of the entire population. We are blessed with a thoughtful, faithful, engaged congregation council. They will continue to be in conversation and communication as we move through these times of social distancing.

There are things that we can do. I ask you to join me in them.

1. Please pray daily for those who are suffering with this disease and for those who are in isolation.
2. Pray daily for all who work in health care.
3. Read your Bible. We have been hearing passages from the Gospel of St. John; please continue by reading a chapter every day.
4. Remember that the expenses of the congregation are ongoing. Mail your weekly contribution to the church or send it electronically. If you are able to increase your giving please do so now as our investment account and trust income will not be producing the quarterly distribution amounts that we anticipated to cover operating costs.
5. Check in with one another using the phone and or social media. Especially make calls to those who may be alone.
6. Check the church website for up-dates and information.
7. Please call me with pastoral concerns 717-968-1612.

We are doing all we can to keep moving forward. This time of social distancing is just that, a time. It is not like it was for the Samaritan Woman a perpetual state of existence until she encountered Christ Jesus. We encounter the One who sat at Jacob's well at that hot noon hour. He comes among us offering us life giving water. He pours himself out for us, not from a jar or bucket, but from the hard wood of the cross. He doesn't distance himself from us but is with us now. Yes even now, giving us life in this moment and for eternity. Amen.

**Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.**

**God of living water, send your church beyond boundaries to proclaim your grace. May its witness be a source of refreshment for thirsty souls. Strengthen our voices, that all people can know and believe that Jesus is truly the savior of the world.**

**God of living water, protect from pollution or misuse all rivers, lakes, oceans, and streams. Bless the work of those who dig wells and those who advocate for access to clean water, that all people and animals have enough to drink.**

**God of living water, open the hearts of leaders and authorities, that they hear the cries of the suffering and act with compassion toward them. Bring peace to disputed lands and bring reconciliation to people divided by race, culture, or nationality.**

**God of living water, mend the hearts of those who grieve broken relationships, whether by conflict, abuse, divorce, or death. Draw near to all who are ill, especially: Theresa Rohrbaugh, Gayle Guyton, Rodney Miller, Amanda, Sylvia Little, Jim Young, Penny Bailey, Eddie Turner, Sr.; Jessica Ericson, Kristine Gross, Porter Stacey, those in the military or in mission work, hospital workers, and all those we name aloud or in our hearts.....**

**Assure those questioning your presence in the midst of doubt or suffering.**

**God of living water, renew us in the promises of baptism. Join us together in worship, fellowship, and sharing your good news. Embolden us to serve others and to work for justice and peace.**

**God of living water, we thank you for those who endured suffering and who now boast in the glory of God. Pour your Holy Spirit into our hearts and give us peace as we live in the hope of our salvation.**

**Merciful God, your healing power is everywhere about us. Strengthen those who work among the sick; give them courage and confidence in all they do.**

**Encourage them when their efforts seem futile or when death prevails. Increase their trust in your power even to overcome death and pain and crying. May they be thankful for every sign of health you give, and humble before the mystery of your healing grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 85)**

**According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**