



Dear People of God:

The Lord be with you! Blessed be God: Father Son and Holy Spirit. And Blessed be God's people, the sheep of God's pasture.

And so in these strange and liminal times as we live into an imposed way of conducting our lives, this Sunday reminds me that some things blessedly do not change. God's love for us; our love for God; our love for each other. In the midst of anxiety when we lie down in the peace of wild things that truism is our day bright star, evening too!

Today's Gospel, John 4:4-42, is one of the lengthiest of the year next to the Passion toward which we journey. Its primary tale is of the Samaritan woman at the well. It is such a wonderful complement to Nicodemus coming to Jesus in the night: day and night, male and female, initiator of contact in one Nicodemus and in the other Jesus himself! Changes of settings and context and chronos cannot change the Love which has come among them/us and the Love which we inhabit in order to become our lovingest/trupest selves.

I was reminded this week of one of my favorite stories upon which I have preached before and will preach again, nevertheless its power is timeless. I came upon it originally in reading Henri Nouwen and it leapt off the page in *Your Faith Your Life*, a book shared with me by my dear friend Dana! Many have speculated that it refers to Michelangelo and while I have not verified this, it certainly tells of great artistry! It goes like this:

A child wandered into a sculptor's studio and watched the sculptor chipping away at an indelible slab of marble. Mesmerized by the process the child returned many days later and was amazed to discover that same block of marble had been transformed into a majestic beautiful lion! "How did you know there was a lion in the marble?" the child asked. "I knew because before I saw the lion in the marble, I saw him in my heart." the artist replied, then continued, "The real secret is that it was the lion in my heart who recognized the lion in the marble."

In these anxious times it is hard to recognize much we thought we knew. And yet our faith reminds us that God knew us in the womb, God always recognizes us and is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. Our now imposed super Lenten practices are

intended to remind us that nothing separates us from the love of God, the very God who knows everything, every last thing.

Jesus met the woman at the well...and He told her everything she'd ever done. Those are the lyrics of a well known folk song often sung by Peter Paul and Mary! In this encounter at the well Jesus sees the "lioness" in a woman who by any other measure was powerless and scorned.

He asks for water; his thirst foreshadows his last words on the cross. She gives it to him, unlike the burning liquid offered later. He, in turn, quenches her heretofore unquenched thirst with living water, the water of eternal life.

Like the Sculptor's tools, the Living Water of our Divine Artist is poured out over the formlessness of our lives and we are shaped into the image of God, the image in our hearts and in God's.

We may not even realize how thirsty we are for that living water. Or we may realize it and be sad because the community which feeds us is physically not assembled today. I invite you to suspend your logic and imagine all of us traveling to gather at the river of life, offering each other the peace, gazing at the cross, the light, the faces, singing our incredibly inspirational hymns and receiving the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have an opportunity today to take nothing for granted and to re-member who and whose we are. We encounter the Living Christ at this strange well of life and we are seen and known. We are loved.

So in the words of institution: Behold who you are Become what you receive, and help the Artist, the sculptor of our lives, to reveal the "lion" within. God re-cognizes you and us. God is forming us as the Body of Christ. We are living into that identity. We the People of the Way have hit a major bump in the road but God will hold us and guide us.

May you encounter the Living Christ this day and receive a cup of living water to sustain us in this wilderness.

Let us pray:

Almighty God,

To you all hearts are open, all desires known and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify thy Holy Name. Amen

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

(I invite us to pray that collect several times today!)

Please take a few moments to remember those on our parish prayer list and those we now name who are on our hearts. Offer gratitude for the blessings of this life. We especially pray for those who are in jeopardy due to the COVID19; pray for those who

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manage and care for global health. Pray for the Holy Spirit to comfort and heal and to relieve anxiety and panic. Pray for restoration and reconciliation.

Say the Lord's Prayer knowing that we all say the prayer Jesus taught us today.

May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up her countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen

let us bless the Lord  
thanks be to God!

Martha+