

At the Well

John 4: 4-42

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I miss you. It is March 15, 2020. The Ides of March.

Remember? In the play Julius Caesar, a soothsayer warns the emperor, "Beware the Ides of March." We know how that story ended in Shakespeare and in Roman history. This was also a day when there were a variety of religious celebrations held in ancient Rome and persons were expected to pay off their debts. Many years ago in this country, some may recall that taxes were due on March 15th. Today is rather historical for us too. Our beautiful Church, St. Vincent's is closed for Mass today.

That would be, the building is closed. Our **Church** will carry on, won't it? We are a faith family. Some of us gather on Saturday evenings at 7:15 and others at 9:30 and 11:45 on Sunday mornings. We come to be nurtured and inspired by God's Word and the Eucharist. And then, we feed each other, in so many other real ways. Our theme this year is to "Build a more Peaceable World." Not even a Pandemic can keep us from doing that. The Ides of March and perhaps a goodly number of days to follow, will be a challenge for us, we will miss everyone. Everyone. We will be together in **Spirit**. We can choose to live in the **Spirit**. This can be our new reality during these difficult days.

Today's Gospel is so important to our tradition; it has so much good stuff in it that liturgists and theologians recommend it be read every Lent, whether it is part of that year's liturgical cycle or not. We only find the account of the Samaritan woman and Jesus in John's Gospel. The story is so familiar it is widely known as The Woman at the Well. There is second teaching in this same chapter regarding Jesus' dialogue with the disciples about the harvest and reapers. I am not going there today, this reflection would be too long and you will doze off for sure!

Samaritans and Jews did not like or trust each other for a number of reasons. One of these being that the Jews believed the Samaritans' ritual washings were unacceptable. Never would the Jews believe that a Samaritan woman's ritual washing was appropriate. She would always seem unclean to them. The woman is shocked because Jesus actually addressed her. He initiated a conversation with a

woman in a public place, at Jacob's well. He asked her for a drink of water! Later the disciples see him speaking with her and they too are stunned and confused.

The nameless woman was not a pushover. She was skeptical and challenged Jesus. She entered into a kind of theological debate with Him. It was something like, "Your people say -- But my people say --" He wins her over. At the well, this woman encountered and connected with Jesus, a Jew, who told her, "I Am the anointed One." He also told her all about herself! He had something else to share with her: living water. This was not the still water of a cistern. He offered her a new Spirit, a share in the very presence of God in the here and now.

Jesus' teaching on water and the Spirit are especially relevant for persons entering the Church at Easter. In the Old Testament, water is a symbol for Wisdom. For the evangelist John, Jesus was Divine Wisdom. What Jesus told the woman about the kind of eternal water He was offering was basically what Isaiah taught many years before Jesus' time "Whoever drinks of this water will never be thirsty."

The woman became a disciple to her Samaritan neighbors. She said, "Come and see for yourselves." She understood there was enough water and Spirit to go around. I am reminded of Mary of Magdala when she ran to tell the disciples on Easter morning, "Come and see, He is risen!" It reminded me of the character Mary in Jesus Christ Superstar.

Sarah Brighton – Mary – sang:

I don't know how to love Him. What to do, how to move Him.

I've been changed; yes really changed. In these past few days when I've seen myself, I seem like someone else. I love Him so.

It would seem we cannot understand the most important things in life from a distance. We cannot build a more peaceable world if we do not get up close and personal. When we move beyond the lines of religions, race, class, gender and we care, listen and converse with both strangers and friends at the wells/opportunities in our lives, we will come to see how real God is. The last line of the reading from Exodus today asked: *Is the Lord present among us or not?*

I had a “well” experience a long, long time ago.

I was a brand new teacher, greener than a shamrock. I taught 7th grade in a public school. Leroy was 12 years old, very thin, about 5 feet tall. Every day he wore a lovely, white starched shirt and a blue tie to school. Each day at recess, he offered to hang out in the classroom with me, to clean chalkboards and wash erasers. One day I asked him, “Leroy, you see those kids out there? They are playing catchers, dodge ball, basketball. Don’t you want to join them?” “No,” he said, “never.” I asked him, “Were they mean to you? Did they call you names?” He said, “Yes, very mean ones. I want to stay inside with you.” I swallowed, took a deep breath and said a prayer. “Leroy,” I said, “You are kind, smart, good. Do you believe me when I say this? Someday, you will need to go out there.” With a beautiful shining face, he said, “I think I do believe you, but I am not ready.” I said, “Ok.” I hardly knew what to do for him. I let him wash boards, clean erasers and basically hide for some time. We would just chat. One day, he said, “Mrs. F. I am going out.” He did.

I don’t know what changed. I hope he had come to know, he was good, kind and smart. Perhaps, Leroy believed he was loved and lovable. He was of course. I believed, on the other hand, because of my connection with Leroy, God was really present in my life.

So yes, for now our lives as we have known them are out of sorts, different. We do not know how long they will be this way. We are OK because any day, like the Samaritan woman, we may meet Jesus at a well. We can find Him in friends, our faith community, our family and unexpected places. We can share the living water via support and compassion. We can spread the Good News, yes the Lord is present among us. We can be the woman at the well and go tell everyone. God’s Spirit is in you. It is in me. We can be changed, really changed. Maybe this time, this crisis is an opportunity; one where we all might be brave enough to drink a new life giving water and experience God’s Spirit- God in new ways. Thanks Leroy. We got this. Jesus Christ Superstar, He loves us so.

Gerry Fialkowski