

15 March 2020
Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Moment in Time, a World of Difference”

Text: John 4:5-30, 39-42

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

What a difference a week can make!

Last Sunday are children were still going to school.

Last Sunday sports were still being played.

Last Sunday there was plenty of food on grocery store shelves.

Now it seems that almost all of life has either been cancelled or put on hold.

Now states have declared States of Emergency, and even the president has declared a national State of Emergency.

I could be wrong, but I don't remember that happening since 9-11.

After those attacks happened, people turned to the church for comfort and for answers.

Churches were filled for a couple of Sundays.

But now even many churches have closed, and folks stay at home in fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of what could happen.

Last Sunday we heard about Nicodemus, who got a one-on-one sit down with Jesus. He didn't get to ask what he wanted to know, though. Instead, Jesus told him what he needed to know. And maybe there is a lot we'd like to ask God today, about what is happening - how long it will last, how bad it will get, and why it is happening. But as with Nicodemus, God doesn't tell all we want to know. But He does tell us what we need to know. And for the rest, He says **trust Me**. I am your Father. I sent My Son to save you. I will always do what is best for you. At all times and in all circumstances. Even if it doesn't seem like it and in things we can't understand. God doesn't cut and run when the going gets tough. He steps up. Even up to the cross.

So no matter what happens in this very uncertain world, and this particular very uncertain time, you can count on Him.

Because, really, this isn't the first time something happened to change your life in an instant. This isn't the first week that changed the world. We're getting ready to enter Holy Week in just a few weeks; a week that really did change the world. When not just many people in the world, but the very Son of God died for the world. When He died

with the virus of our sin to save us from it. That though we all have that virus and will one day succumb to it, we rise back to life immune and separate from it forever. And never have to worry about it again.

And that all became yours in the one moment that changed your life forever - when you were baptized. When all that Jesus did for you that Holy Week became yours - your sin divinely healed with His forgiveness and your life now eternal. And nothing that can happen to you now can top that. Your now and your future are safe in Jesus' hands.

So be wise, be careful, be safe, and be smart, but do not fear. *Perfect love casts out fear* (1 John 4:18). And Jesus' love for you is perfect.

Our love isn't. Our love comes and goes, waxes and wanes, and often falls short. The people we thought we could count on let us down. The people who count on us are disappointed. Our failure to love causes all sorts of trouble and fear in our lives and in our world.

And we heard one such example of that today - the Samaritan woman at the well. Earthly love had let her down, time after time after time after time after time. For five times she had been married, and five times those marriages ended. Was it because of death or divorce or some combination of them? We aren't told. But the man she was now with, living with as if he was her husband, was not her husband. Perhaps she had given up on love.

But it seems it wasn't just men - she comes out to the well to draw water *at the sixth hour*, that is, 12 Noon. I was having a conversation with TJ the other day, and she said that when you're from Arizona, you don't do outside work in the middle of the day, when the sun is high in the sky and the temperature is at its highest. You go out in the morning or in the evening, when it is cooler.

So too for the women of the town whose job it was to go to the well to draw water. Water is heavy. Hauling it hard work. You go to the well in the morning or in the evening, when it is cooler. Except if you're not welcome and you're forced to come out in the heat of the day, 12 Noon. Alone. No one to help. No one to talk to. No one to share your day with. It was like this woman was contagious! We don't want to get whatever she has!

And the Jews - whose land surrounded the region of Samaria - treated the Samaritans like that all the time.

Here is a woman in need of love. *Thirsty* for love. Any love.

And so love shows up. Walks right up to her that day, and sits down by the well. A chance meeting? Coincidence? Some might say. But maybe not. Maybe just for her was

Jesus there . . .

And He loves her. He's going to be on the cross for her soon. For her sins. In perfect love, laying down His life for her. And Jesus wants her to know that. To know Him as her Saviour. The one who does not reject her, even if the rest of her town or the rest of the world, does. He does not. In fact, He wants her as His Bride. To be part of His Bride, the Church.

So they have a conversation. Unlike Nicodemus, she gets to ask her questions. And Jesus answers them. And Jesus speaks of something beyond being a Jew or a Samaritan; something that supercedes nationality - where you come from or where you live or where you worship. For, Jesus says, ***God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.***

There are some people today who are spiritual but don't have the truth. There are some who know the truth but are not spiritual. The key is that ***to worship is spirit and in truth*** is worship **in Jesus**. For He is the truth, and the Spirit gives us Jesus and His gifts. That's what worship is, after all. That's why we call it the Divine Service. Here the Divine is serving us. The Spirit bringing us the forgiveness, life, and salvation of Jesus through His Word and Sacraments. No matter who you are. No matter where you live or what nationality you are.

Before Jesus, in the Old Testament, that Divine Service was restricted to the Temple, where the sacrifices took place. But now that Jesus has come, now that the once-and-for-all sacrifice has been made, the Spirit has been unleashed and that Divine Service now has gone out into all the world, to every pulpit, altar, and font where Jesus is present in His Word and with His Spirit. Even at a well in Samaria. And so His love and forgiveness and life is here, for you.

Well right then and there, face-to-face with the Messiah, that woman's life changed in a moment. A day that started out like any other turned out to be different than any other. The love she was so thirsty for was poured out on her. So she goes back to town and tells everyone. She says ***come, see a man who told me all that I ever did.*** But I think she said more than that. I think she said something like this . . . ***Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did . . . and didn't reject me!***

That, you see, was the amazing part for her. Apparently, everyone in the town already knew about her and all she ever did. And she wasn't welcome because of it. But here was a man who knew and ***didn't*** reject her. Perfect love. And she was thirsty no more.

Jesus knows all that you have done, too. All the sins you're ashamed of, all the sins you're proud of, all the sins you've kept hidden from others and so you look good and upright. Jesus knows them all. ***Which is good.*** For it means He died for them all. Every

single one.

Jesus came to be with us and wasn't afraid of catching what we have - the virus of our sin. He spends time with this Samaritan woman, touches lepers, and embraces sinners. In fact, His perfect love caused Him to come, *specifically to* catch what we had - to take our sin and take it away from us, and give us His divine healing. And He has. It wasn't the nails that took His life - it was your sin. But because they did, you now have life. The living water of His forgiveness and love, that you might never thirst again. And that you might not fear.

Rudyard Kipling once wrote a poem entitled "If" that started out with what has become a rather famous quote: *If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs . . .*

That seems to be a particular problem these days. And while Kipling describes lots of ways to do that in this poem, he misses the most important one of all - **Christ**. For with Christ, in Christ, and with your eyes and faith focused on Christ, *you have* what the world needs. And when the world is falling apart, when confidence is shaken, when the future is uncertain - *you have* what nothing in this world can change or take away: Christ. He is with you in life and in death. For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. Perfect love. Living water. Spirit and truth. All yours, for you are His. His Bride. His Church.

So be wise, be careful, be safe, and be smart, but do not fear.

Remember the week that changed the world and, like this Samaritan woman, the moment that changed your life.

And come and receive the Body and Blood of the one who is perfect love, gives you living water, forgives your sins, and will never, ever be ashamed of you. All that you need, He has, and He gives.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.