

Friends,

Since you are worshipping at home today and you might have a little more time for your worship than we do when we are together, I invite you to read through our scripture carefully. Notice the detail in this story. It's a powerful one, with lots of dialogue and lots of symbolism. We have never read this text in the context in which we are now living. How does this new experience shape and inform the way we encounter this story? Walk through this Good News with me as we seek to grow in wisdom.

OUR JOURNEY DISRUPTED

I've never been a pastor through a pandemic before. So far it is has not been easy to navigate. This is not the Lenten journey that I had planned for us at Zion (planning which had begun weeks ago, months ago, even). What we are witnessing happening around the world is unprecedented. Fear, anxiety, and suspicion are rampant. Information is flying at us from every direction. I'm trying to keep up, but I have quickly realized there is no route that has been mapped out for a journey such as this. I've had to set aside my plans and trust in the leading of the Spirit.

Perhaps you've been planning, too—planning events, trips, and outings that you've been looking forward to for weeks or even months. Those plans have had to change or have maybe been canceled altogether. Maybe you find yourself wishing there was more direction for this journey. Right now, you might not be able to visit your loved ones. The groceries and household items you need have been wiped from the shelves. Your school might have moved all of your classes to an online format and those personal interactions with your teachers and classmates are no longer there to assist in your learning. And now, Sunday has come (and maybe gone by the time you're reading this) and you were not able to be with your church family to worship, sing, and pray together. Our journey has been disrupted.

Disruptions often demand that we take time to pause and reflect in order to seek the wisdom we need to carry on in our journey. In our passage for today, Jesus sets out into new territory, as he leaves Judea for Galilee (v. 3) and finds himself in Samaria (v. 4). We find Jesus pausing on this journey, and it is here where something surprising and life-giving happens.

FATIGUE

Jesus takes a pause in his journey because he is tired (v. 6) and needs a refreshing drink (v. 7). I don't know about you, but I am feeling incredibly tired in these moments and could sure use some refreshment. There has been a lot happening "behind the scenes" at Zion as our leadership has been listening for the Spirit as we make decisions about our ministry. A lot of energy is being put into figuring out ways for us to continue our ministry in different formats. We're needing to be creative and flexible. You've probably been experiencing this, too, in your work and with your families. Like Jesus, when we are tired, it is good to find space to pause and be refreshed if we can.

I hope that many of us can use this time of disruption to pause and feed our spirits, to continue engaging in our Lenten disciplines of prayer, reading scripture, helping others, reaching out to strangers, and challenging ourselves to grow. If you find yourself at home instead of out and about, perhaps this is time for you to engage in study and prayer. It could be an opportunity to reach out to others through phone calls, texts, cards, and emails.

However, I'm mindful that there are a lot of people who will not have the opportunity to pause when they are tired in the weeks ahead. We have community leaders working around the clock trying to keep people safe and well. We have people in healthcare working tirelessly to bring healing, comfort, and calm to their patients. There are people trying to keep up with the demand at the grocery store. Parents who are trying to figure out how to care for their children since the schools are shut down. Those who are vulnerable in their health and should be self-isolating but can't because if they do, they could lose their jobs. There are those who will soon find themselves unemployed and will be seeking ways to carve out a livelihood. I invite you to pray for all of these and more who are longing for rest on this journey.

PLACE

When Jesus pauses on his journey, he pauses at a particular place—Jacob's well. This was a place that brought people together (see Genesis 24). It was where Jesus' ancestors also found refreshment and renewal. Places are important. They can be sacred, holy ground. They play roles in our journeys that can be powerful. I imagine that for many of you, our sanctuary at Zion is such a place, and it is probably hard that you can't worship with your church family in that place.

Jesus says something interesting about place and our worship. He reminds us that our worship is not bound to any single place (v. 21). We can worship anywhere and everywhere. Right now, we might not be able to gather in that sacred place that we love—our sanctuary at Zion—but that can't stop us from worshiping. I keep reminding people that we have not canceled worship. We are simply worshiping in a different place and in a different format. I'm looking forward to that moment when we can all be together again, but in the meantime our worship will continue in new places.

ISOLATION

As I read through this text again and again, as our context in this world changes and develops, I find myself focusing in on the isolation that this woman exhibits in this text. She comes to this well alone. There is a lot that we don't know about this woman, though we are often prone to try to fill in the details about her life based on the few things we do know. Perhaps she has been cast out of her community and so ventures out alone in the heat of the noonday to draw water from this well. It seems like there have been many people in her life who are no longer there for whatever reason (the five husbands of her past). She is surprised that this stranger at the well reaches out to her with the request for a drink. She notices immediately the social, religious, and political distance that ought to keep them apart—"How is it that you, a Jew, asks

a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (v. 9). As the conversation between this woman and Jesus develops, I sense that there is a longing in her to be restored and refreshed.

I think Jesus has been very intentional here about reaching out to this woman. He doesn't allow these societal boundaries to keep him away. Right now, we are practicing “social distancing,” a tool that can keep people well, slow-down the spread of Covid-19, and save lives. We have been asked to be wise and keep our physical distance from one another, but this physical distance does not have to lead to complete isolation. We can still be community, offering love, support, and care to one another from a distance.

Not being together can be hard. Feelings of loneliness can be overwhelming. If during this time you find yourself feeling the strain of isolation, please, reach out to your church family, your friends, your neighbors. They may also be in need of some company from a distance. I've been touched by all of the videos going around from Italy and Spain of people out on their balconies singing together and even exercising together. Being reminded that there are people out there who care can lift up the spirit in such a beautiful way. Let's be intentional about strengthening the ties that bind us, even when we can't be together in-person.

COMPASSION AND GENEROSITY

Finally, I am in awe of the great compassion Jesus showed for this woman. In reaching out, in not allowing boundaries to get in the way, Jesus is able to offer to this woman life-giving waters that will never run dry but will gush up like a spring (v. 14). In times such as these, how vital it is that we meet one another with compassion and generosity instead of fear and division. Let's model what Jesus did by being compassionate and generous toward one another. We can be compassionate with our leaders—our leaders here at Zion, the leaders of our local agencies and hospitals, the leaders of our cities and our state, the leaders of our country and the world. None of us have been through this before, and we are doing our best to navigate this road ahead. Let's be generous toward our neighbors by making sure people don't have to go without those basic needs. Let's be generous with our patience and kindness, with our love and care. At this moment in our journey, as people of faith, we can offer hope and encouragement that will help get us through these hard and sometimes scary moments. And, like this woman at the well, may we go out into the world to share this Good News. May we not only proclaim with our words but enact the love of God in our lives, and may Jesus be the guiding light we need as we navigate these uncertain times.

Pastor Sarah

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