

Sunday, June 28, 2020 Genesis 22:1-14 Matthew 10:40-42

A Whole New World

What is this? A simple glass of water. But it is more than this. It is a glass of water which opens up possibilities way beyond hydrating whoever drinks it. Just look at it for a moment. Depending upon your particular circumstance of whether you are thirsty or not, this glass of water may or may not be very appealing. But it is clear, wet, cool, and necessary for life. There is nothing extravagant in its appearance, yet a simple glass of water can make the difference between life and death, chaos and peace, being left out or welcomed. This is just a simple glass of water or is it so simple?

Now that restaurants are open again in most of Ontario for patio or eating outside, one can order water. It used to be that in the summertime especially, servers would automatically bring you glasses of water. But today one must ask and then there is a choice to be made—tap or bottled. Tap water is free, but bottled water is not and if you choose bottled water there are more choices to be made. Water we know is something we need to consume every day. Average size adults need 8 cups or 2 L each day to maintain basic hydration. This does not include the replenishment of water after a workout or the need to drink on high humidity days which we have already experienced here in Windsor. Water is needed to live and to maintain health.

Our culture teaches us many things about how we receive the basic necessities of life including our need for food and water. But it is our faith that calls us to believe that God will provide. God will provide what is needed for life. During these weeks of lockdown and pandemic many people have wondered why this situation now and how the whole world has been effected. Yet for many others this has been a time of stress and upheaval because there have been times when people have worried about getting food for their families. Food banks across the country have seen an increased demand by all family groupings. Others have completed food drives and Miracle Days (like Chatham Kent in May and Windsor Essex yesterday) to get much needed food to the foodbanks. People just don't have the money to purchase what is in plentiful supply in our stores. What is amazing is that everyone is welcome to share in the abundance if they need it.

Our story of Abraham and Sarah continues from Genesis 22. This couple welcomed their son Isaac upon which future generations of their family and nation depended. As a young boy Isaac was taught the traditions of the faith and knew of feast days, times of sacrifice and

what this meant to both his parents. One day, God told Abraham that he was to take Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering on the side of a mountain. The next day, Abraham rose early took two helpers, loaded up firewood along with Isaac and they went on a journey to the mountains. On the third day they arrived near the place where the sacrifice was to be made. He left the young men there and took the boy up the mountainside to worship. He then prepared the fire and wood for the sacrifice. When Isaac asked where the lamb was for the sacrifice all Abraham said was, "God will provide." As they approached the site for worship, Abraham built an altar, laid the wood upon it and then bound his son and placed him upon the wood. Abraham was about to kill the boy when an angel of God yelled out, "Don't do anything to him. You fear God and did not withhold your son." Abraham then looked up and saw a ram caught in the bush. He got it out, killed it and used it as the sacrifice to God. Abraham was then blessed for his faithfulness and returned home. Abraham had said, "God will provide." And God did.

How deep is your faith to even bind any child for a sacrifice to God- let alone one who was born to you at age 100? Yet Abraham had faith, believed and trusted God. God provided the ram for the sacrifice. God provided what was needed because Abraham was willing to give up his son as a sacrifice. This shows Abraham's love for God. It is many years later that we learn how God provided Jesus, His Son to be the sacrifice for all of us. God will provide.

How kind and welcoming are you? In these last few months we have not been able to have visitors, be hospitable to others, or go out to eat where servers bring you food and drink while you relax. People who are wonderful servers do not always have it easy as there are customers who may be rude and obnoxious. Occasionally, you might have a server who is having a bad day and they are not so welcoming or friendly. There are also others who welcome people—what about a butler to an estate home? Do they always want to allow some people in and do so with a smile? Today receptionists work in all kinds of offices, stores and workplaces and their main role is to say hi and welcome. Walmart is known for hiring seniors to do this work which is an essential part of the shopping experience. People like to be made welcome as they come into an establishment not just seeing a security guard staring off into space.

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt so welcomed you did not want to leave the entrance? Have you ever been told that you are a great person to greet others? How did you respond?

Jesus was teaching his disciples about what to do when they were going out amongst the people to 'proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven was near. We read in

Matthew 10: 5-14: "They were to also cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. They were not to take any money with them or to receive pay for what they would share with the people. As they went into communities they were to enter the community and to find out who in it is worthy- and stay there until they leave the community. If the house is worthy let peace come upon it, but receive back the peace if it is not worthy. Jesus also said that "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town." He further explains how important this welcoming is. Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous. And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, truly I tell you none of these will lose their reward."

Jesus emphasized the need to be welcomed and welcoming as we share with others His message of the kingdom of heaven. And it all begins by simply offering a cup of cold water, a simple hello, and a blessing or prayer.

Two church members were going door to door. They knocked on the door of a home where the woman who opened it was not happy to see them. She told them in no uncertain terms that she did not want to hear their message and slammed the door in their faces. To her surprise, however, the door did not close. In fact, it bounced back open. She tried slamming the door again, really putting her back into it. The result was the same - the door bounced back open. Convinced that the unwanted callers must be sticking a foot in the doorway, she reared back to give it a slam that would teach them a lesson, when one of them said, "Ma'am, before you do that again, you need to move your cat out of the way." Then we say, 'they even cared about the welfare of the cat; she just did not want to hear the message,' and so they walked away.

Today we may not have as many door-to-door salespeople but there are telemarketers, computer spammers, television ads and even pop-up advertising through different media devices. These are the unwelcomed merchandisers of the digital age. So how do you handle them? You know which ones come by phone- air duct cleaning, needing to fix your computer or even and checking on your credit cards. How do you respond? You don't have to buy and hear everything but how you respond does make a difference not only for the listener but you as well. Are you answering the caller politely or rudely, friendly or mean, with anger or calm and firm?

Maybe you need to think about what it would be like if you were the one calling. How welcoming are you?

In John 4, Jesus is tired and hungry from his journey into Sychar, Samaria. It is almost noon and so he sends the disciples to go buy food and bring it back to the community well where he is resting. They leave and a short time later a woman comes to the well to draw water. Jesus asks, "Give me a drink." Maybe Jesus is really thirsty and hungry as he openly speaks to this woman. He sure does not sound friendly and the woman is taken aback by Jesus being so forward. After all, women and men did not speak in public, and in this situation, a Jewish man asked a Samaritan woman for a drink- how rude! The woman is somewhat afraid of speaking to this man and yet Jesus continues to talk to this woman because he knows all about her life. In fact, after their discussion, the woman leaves her water jars, returns home and tells all those whom she sees about this man who is the Messiah. How do we understand Jesus' approach to the woman? It was not very pleasant—almost demanding the drink of water yet her response was not expected either. But as their discussion continues—Jesus tells her about living water and the hope of eternal life through him. And it is at this point the woman's life is changed. She leaves her reason for going out at noon –the water jugs- and tells everyone about Jesus. The community hears the story and Jesus and the disciples stay two days. "As a result of Jesus asking for a simple glass of water "many more believed because of his word".

When we think of welcoming others into our homes what do we do? Clean up, prepare food and snacks, maybe change clothes and clean up ourselves. What happens when you are welcomed somewhere else? We greet each other- hugs, handshakes, smiles and caring words.

This week in Windsor Essex we now must wear masks into all businesses. This has created some new problems as people are realizing that by wearing masks you are actually breathing in old expired air. These masks also hinder those with hearing impairments as they rely on reading lips and cannot understand what others are saying as it is muffled into the masks. There are also those who cannot have the hospital grade masks due to sensitivity. And there are many who are wearing masks when they do not need to or wearing them incorrectly. But the reality is no matter where you are or what you are wearing, the need to be welcoming and friendly is never higher. Because everyone is wearing a mask, our ability to communicate has changed. Masks hide our mouths and cover our noses and this makes it difficult to see expressions on our faces, especially our smiles. So how do express our emotions- especially if we want to smile?

We have heard that we are all in this together but as businesses and parks re open we need to get along with others and be patient as processes and protocols are put in place. This is because we will have to slow down and wait, not always be able to get what we want or need with every trip to the store and we must do so with patience. We are living in a new world and will be for the foreseeable future.

This new world was not predicted in 2019 by those making predictions for 2020. When we learned of this coronavirus it had no name nor was it isolated from others. All we learned fairly quickly was that it caused illnesses which led to death. But once the severe effects were made public our world stopped. No traffic in the air, cruises were cancelled and everyone was ordered to stay at home. Most people were compliant but there were exceptions. Even right now as we all are to wear masks in businesses not everyone agrees that the risk is still there. We need to combat the problem and to do so together. WE need to work together in order that we may share in our grief, our losses and to learn together ness in a nw way.

This is a new world—as we are limiting our shopping trips, our browsing time and buying what we need through the internet. We are not using real cash and tap and go are now normal for more than gas purchases. Our language has enveloped new phrases and words – social distancing, N95 masks, covid19, PPE, zoom meetings, Stay Home, and we now know who are key leaders are in the medical field, not only provincially but nationally as well. We have come to respect our government leaders in a new way and we have learned that there will always be people who need support at any time. And we have looked to those whom we care about- family and church family, our friends in a new way. We welcome their company, their love and support and we strive to reciprocate this welcome not only through tangible means like the cup of water the Samaritan woman gave to Jesus, but in intangible ways- through sharing the hope and love of God who does provide everything we need. Because through prayer and sharing our concerns with God, he sees what is needed and calls us to action. God calls us to do what is needed so that we too can receive Christ's peace as the disciples first shared it. But we need to be welcoming anas well. We need to open our hearts so that others may see in us the Spirit which leads and guides our actions. This is the hope and prayer that the world needs right now that we will welcome others as they are- whether in need, or pain or hurting; whether giving or healing or helping, we need to welcome each other as the children of God. For we know and believe that God will provide our human needs, what we must share is Christ's love in us. We must be welcoming and welcome-able. As important as these characteristics are to the economy and to the church, this is what the kingdom of God is all about. For when we complete

our life's journey, what our hope and prayer is for each person, is God's welcoming embrace in heaven. Are you hoping for this? Are you searching for what is to come in this world? Or the next? Have faith; be not afraid. God will provide just as he gave to us Jesus. We just need to welcome Christ within our lives and then tell others this good news. This is our faith and this is our hope. Thanks be to God.