

Sunday, March 15, 2020

Exodus 17:1-7

Romans 5:1-11

John 4:8-42

Hangry and Put Out by Faith

This week, when the World Health Organization declared the COVID19 virus as pandemic as it is affecting the global population there was a ripple affect experienced around the world. Emotions climbed from contentment to panic, wonder and excitement to fulfill a need. Grocery stores were filled with people and long check out lines were imminent as people were searching for what they might need- toilet paper and basic stock up foods. But there was also a sense of uncertainty of what this declaration means for individuals. How do we explain what is happening to children, to elderly to those who had made plans for this March Break and now are uncertain of what will occur for the next 3 weeks? How are we to be cautious and look after ourselves?

We are people who have been given the gift of emotions and when something occurs beyond our control we look to see what we can do. It is not something new for people but how we handle the situation makes a difference.

Our Exodus 17 reading occurs as the Israelites have left Egypt and were camping at Raphidim- a rocky area of land but with no source of water. The people quarrelled with Moses and said "Give us water to drink." He asked, "Why do you quarrel with Me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted for water, they were complaining- angry, hungry, thirsty and even questioned why they left Egypt in the first place as they would certainly die in the desert without water or food. They were truly "hangry" which is a word picked up from Snickers chocolate bar advertisements combining hungry and anger. They were angry for the situation in which they found themselves but also hungry and searching for the basic necessities of life- water and food. But most importantly, they were angry with God.

Moses cries out to God, "What shall I do with this people:" they are almost ready to stone me." Then God gives Moses instructions to go with some of the elders to where there are large rocks at Horeb. There Moses is to take his staff and strike the rock. Water will come out of it. Moses did this and water gushed out. This place was then called Massah and Meribah meaning test and quarrel because it was there that the Israelites quarreled and tested God.

Around the world people are at a loss of what to do. As one woman said to me in the grocery store on Friday, "I want to make sure my baby has food in this crisis". She had

purchased a lot of bottles of baby food. Others were buying toilet paper and Kleenex products but little food- just in case we need it. But why are we having these long lineups in stores- because there is fear of what is and what is to come.

People are afraid of what this might do to our economy—it is not a question now of might do—the economy is shifting already, gas prices are falling, people are not travelling in this peak season to travel and schools are out for 3 weeks across Ontario. Universities and colleges are moving to online classes as quickly as possible with the universities just 3 weeks from classes being completed. But the question we need to ask is why is there fear? Why are people afraid?

The story of Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar is a story of empathy, care and love. Jesus stayed by the well in Sychar around noon. A woman comes to draw water and breaking the social rules of the time Jesus asks for a drink. Not only did he talk with a woman in public, she was a Samaritan woman one with whom Galileans did not associate. But Jesus did not get put out by her questioning what he was doing by asking for a drink from her, but stated “If you really knew who I am you would not hesitate to give me a drink.” Was Jesus thirsty-probably-it was noon and the heat of the day was building. Why was this woman by herself in the middle of the day? Most women would get the family’s water needs early in the morning and carry it back later. Maybe Jesus knew that meeting the Samaritan was not just a chance encounter. Who was she? We learn that she is a woman who has had 5 husbands and is with a sixth man. By society standards her reputation was not great but Jesus talks with her about the living water he offers. They discuss what this living water is- a way of describing His Spirit which will never leave them thirsty. The living water which springs up gushing to eternal life. But she did not fully understand. She wanted what he offered- but because she thought it would be great not to have to go to the well again. But what Jesus was speaking about was the spiritual needs we all have. This woman was probably overwhelmed by her choices and the circumstances in which she found herself- out of community relationships. But here Jesus is offering her something more than ever thought possible- living water of faith unto eternity.

What does she do? She leaves her water jar- the purpose of her task at the well- and goes back through the streets and tells all whom she sees, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” Many people followed her and they asked him to stay for a few days. They wanted to hear him speak about eternal life, the living water and they came to know him as the Saviour of the world.

Many people in the world are hungry and angry. They are searching for answers to questions which they don’t even know what to ask-regarding this virus which has lead to travel

restrictions, school closures and events being cancelled. What people can do is shop- for the essentials and wonder what is next. But we can also not be afraid or fearful of the unknown. There are scientists around the world working diligently to discover the nature of this virus and in turn a serum which controls its spread. A lot of what people are afraid of is not knowing what to expect if one has this illness or what the outcome might be. But there are and will be ways of finding out. An assessment centre will open on Monday at the Ouellette site of the hospital to combat this fear and prayerfully there will not be any local people affected.

The Samaritan woman had many things going on in her life but Jesus looked beyond this, and offered her hope through the gift of living water made possible through him. This is what the world needs right now- hope. Jesus spoke not only with this one woman in Sychar but with all who wanted to hear him talk about eternal life and to offer a life beyond what they knew. Later on in John 7, Jesus also states ,“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink! He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” This living water enables us to have hope but also to have peace. For when we know our future is with God in God’s promised heavenly home we need not fear anything.

The media reports will continue while information about this virus and its effects on every day life become known. As people of faith, we are not to be afraid to we are called to pray and seek God’s guidance in the days ahead. We need to ask God for His wisdom, help, and provision. To help us control our emotions so that we are slow in anger, that we can eat healthy food and to keep well. We are not to question why God would allow this—because we have choices and decisions to make. This virus will spread and from this experience we can also learn and grow together. We are all in this together. So let us be faithful in prayer, to offer hope and dispel fear. Remember Jesus as he boldly spoke to a woman about her life and as a result, a community came to know him as the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus challenged society then, just as we are challenged today and tomorrow. Let us grow in faith knowing that God is the one who knows all things and brings hope. Let us rejoice in this and be faithful to the one who made us and calls us to live by faith.

Let us pray:

God you know what we need = wisdom to learn about this virus and how we may prevent more people from getting ill. Help us God to remain peaceful and provide for us what we need as individuals and as people searching for answers. May your peace prevail on earth. Amen.