**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

Bean Blossom, Indiana

Third Sunday of Lent, Year A, March 12, 2023

Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson

Exodus 17:1-7 **Psalm 95**  Romans 5:1-11 **John 4:5-42**

Good morning! We’re all here on time! Was anyone here at 8:30? Did you at least make coffee? I know we would ALL have appreciated that!

Before I begin my sermon, I want to share a portion of the epistle of Paul to the Romans that I think should be on every refrigerator door. I want to share it because I love its hopefulness and the promise of peace. I want to share it because I have experienced it, as I suspect you have as well, but it is good to have it handy in advance of when we hit rough patches, or chasms.

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Thank you for bearing with me. Not that you had a choice.

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I have a pond behind my condo, and my double door opens to it. Some of the neighbors call it a lake, which I find hysterical. It sounds so powerful and majestic, a lake, perhaps surrounded by the Alps? But it does just fine as a pond. It changes its looks throughout the day as the sun and shadows move by. It changes throughout the year. It gives a feeling of coolness when the sun beats down. It gives solace by its unchangeableness. It entertains friends like a lonely bull frog and herons and ducks, some baby ducks learning to swim in it before they go off, wherever they go, well taught. The pond provides entertainment as fall changes to winter, and geese spot it from above, familiar, one of their homes. But they don’t notice the change. Until they hit it, they hit the ice it has become and their feet go out ahead of them, and they squawk in rage, or, I think, embarrassment. They’ve been through this before, they should know better. But, like us, sometimes they have to learn the same lesson more than once. Because they have geese brains. I don’t know what our excuse is.

Water runs through our readings this morning. A story of near insurrection happens when the Jews are wondering the desert and there is no water to be found. We hear it calmly knowing we are provided for, our room is comfortable, climate controlled; but it was life or death in that desert and the people were terrified and had had it. Their demands become more pitched. After receiving a deluge of anger, or perhaps better called a sandstorm of anger, Moses responds:

“Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

“Stone you, do you say, Moses? As a matter of fact, I will stone you. But in a different way.”

And God leads Moses and a couple of witnesses to the least likely place to look for water, a solid rock. And so it is done. Major crisis averted. The salvation story does not end early and as a failure.

The people of East Palestine, Ohio, are rising up, and of course they are. Tanking property values are bad enough, they fear death from the contamination of chemicals forced on them through the carelessness and maintenance failures of a huge corporation.

Another story of David and Goliath. Another example that water is as basic as an answer gets when the question is about the viability of life. This time, Goliath is not a mostly blind giant stumbling into harming others, but an intentional actor placing profits before safety and life. This time, David needs help. A lot of help.

In the Gospel we rehear that well-known story of the Jesus and the Samaritan woman. This story is layered, nuanced, and chock-full of social history and prejudice. Exceptional prejudice.

Jews thought that Samaritans were lower than dogs in Jesus’s day, and women Samaritans were lower even than that. It is unheard of that Jesus spoke to her; John found it important to note that the disciples were off buying food, because they would have had a fit and run the woman off. Jesus knew the woman had a bad reputation because no one would go to the well at noon, in the worst heat of the day, unless they wanted to avoid the snide looks and remarks of the neighbors. Jesus apparently read the woman as only Jesus could, reading her inside as well as outside.

After asking for water, Jesus says something enigmatic: that he would give the woman living water, so that she would never thirst again. You know the story, Jesus uncovers the woman’s serial marital history and current sin.

And Jesus continued to abide with her. He continues to engage her. He hasn’t condemned her for her story. In fact, he wipes away the historic hatred of Samaritans and Jews by dismissing where each group worships, taking all the people of both groups to a common, higher, more sacred ground.

The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

How often do we hear Jesus admonish his followers to keep his identity a secret? It may just be John, but here is Jesus saying “I am the Messiah” to a woman who is clearly a sinner and an outcast to the Jews. Here is Jesus saying that he brings the living water of Baptism that will unite these enemies. When the disciples return, they make no comments about the woman. Perhaps they sense that something holy is happening here, so concern themselves with eating. Of course they do. In the meantime, the woman leaves and tells others about Jesus, about the uncovering of her sins, about his staying with her **anyway.**  It shocks them. They go to see for themselves.

This is as shocking as if Proud Boys and Oath Keepers went with open minds to hear the Rev. Al Sharpton. The Samaritans listened for two days. They said they came to believe Jesus because of their own experiences, their own witness. Imagine the shifting of a tectonic plate.

That is the power of living water. That is the power of setting aside our mistakes, our messes, our humiliations, and moving into Jesus’s promise and blessing. That is why it is worth taking the time to consider what we need to purify in ourselves again, for the arrival of Christ within us.

Jesus knows who we are. He comes with living water and living bread. He invites you to this altar to accept that bread, and the wine of a brand new, breathing, flowing covenant. Jesus pointed out to the disciples that workers are needed because the harvest is near. The harvest of sinners, the harvest of outcasts, the harvest of Samaritans. We are both the harvest and those who reap others, to bring them to the promises of Christ. We are part of a circle of life in Christ.

Living water, when carried in the actions of followers of Jesus, can address the injustice of East Palestine and Flint, Michigan, and Jackson Mississippi. Living water, when shared by the followers of Jesus, can bring joy to those whose spirits are parched. Living water, unlike the ice on the pond behind my condo, will never embarrass the geese just as those of us who carry that water will never bring shame to others.

Thanks be to God.