

A Sunday Devotional for God's People in Church and At Home
The First Church of Evans
Communion Sunday - August 2, 2020
10am Service

Greetings from Jerusalem Corners,

This Sunday will mark the second time this summer we have gathered to share in that meal that celebrates all that Jesus did to make us his children and family at church. It has been good to be together and to pray and hear God's word and to hear music that glorifies him on Sunday mornings. Our attendance has varied from almost 60 to just over 30, but we have been able to safely social distance on Sundays, so no reservations will be necessary going forward. Just come with an open heart and join us in his presence, together again.

Call to Worship

Isaiah 49:8-10

Kathy Allen

*Thus says the LORD: "In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you.
I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion desolate heritages.
You will say to prisoners, 'Come out!' and to those who are in darkness, 'Appear!'
They shall feed along the ways; on all the bare heights shall be their pasture.
They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them.
For he who has pity on them will lead them, and by streams of water he shall guide them..."*

Hymn

"Like a River Glorious"

Choir Members

An Opening Prayer

Almighty Father and Savior,

We worship you as that God whose abode is high and mighty, and yet at the same you abide with those who are humble and contrite at heart. Forgive us for that pride that makes us blind to our own sins and tempts us to condemn the sins of others, and teach us that humility and gentleness that led Jesus to become our Servant and Savior. We ask this through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Devotional

John 4:7-19

Carl Mende, Elder and Properties Chair

*A woman from Samaria came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."
For his disciples had gone away into town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him,
"How is it that you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus
answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,'
you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him,
"Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?
Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."
Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water I give him
will never be thirsty again. The water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not become thirsty and have to come here to draw water."
Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband."
Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands
and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."
The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."*

Our passage this morning begins with Jesus traveling through the area of Samaria fleeing from Judea toward Galilee because His ministry had grown to the point that it had attracted the attention of the Pharisees and He did not want to have a confrontation with them yet. After a long day of walking, Jesus was tired and thirsty and stopped to rest by Jacob's well near the town of Sychar. As Jesus sat there in the noonday heat, there came to the well a Samaritan woman. Now the Jews of Jesus day despised the Samaritans because they were the descendants of Israel's lawless northern tribes who, hundreds of years earlier, had been carried away to Assyria. Those few survivors that were left had intermarried with the non Jewish pagans who had moved into the region, leaving children who were not quite Jewish living a heritage that was far from kosher.

Jesus proceeded to astonish the woman by asking her for a drink of water. She said to him "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" This was astonishing on multiple counts, first she was a Samaritan and the Jews did not even associate with them, never mind share a cup of water and second, she was a woman. The strict rabbi's of the day would never speak to any woman in public; not even their own wives. Jesus then proceeds to lift the conversation from the physical to the spiritual. He says to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." However the woman didn't understand and asked Jesus another question, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" The Samaritan woman was still focused on the physical, thinking that Jesus was referring to the water in the well.

Jesus goes on to say, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." This statement was nothing less than Jesus stating that He was the Anointed One, the Messiah, yet the woman still didn't make the spiritual connection and asked Jesus, "Sir, give me this water" Jesus asks her to call her husband and she very quickly responds, 'I have no husband.' to which Jesus now reveals to her that He knows that she has had five husbands but is now living with someone who is not her husband. The woman finally begins to understand the spiritual message that Jesus was bringing. She says, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." She was suddenly compelled to face herself and the total inadequacy of her life.

What we see here is Jesus breaking down barriers. We see the heart of the gospel. We see God in the person of Jesus, so loving the world, not just in theory but in action by speaking to a Samaritan woman. Jesus told her that He would provide living water, a spiritual analogy that the physical thirst we all experience is an illustration of the spiritual thirst, the inner thirst, we all share. Men and women in this world are looking for something deeper than what this life brings, they are thirsty for something more than the physical. No one can find true happiness in the human situation, in this life.

The Samaritan woman had tried, she had had five husbands and was now living with a sixth man who she wasn't married to. What she really needed was Jesus, the true Bridegroom. People are thirsty but only what Jesus gives satisfies to the deepest levels of man's soul and spirit. In our Call to Worship, the Prophet Isaiah spoke of the Messiah in His Kingdom, and said this, "*they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for He who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water he will guide them.*"

Offering Acts 20:35 "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

The offering plate is placed on the way out of the sanctuary, or you can mail your offering from home to:

The First Church of Evans, Attn: Cindy Fanara, P.O. Box 364, Derby, NY, 14047.

Hymn

"Wonderful Grace of Jesus"

Choir Members

The Holy Communion

Prayer After Communion

Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic and to social unrest. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please pray for our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities, and remember those people who have lost loved ones, most recently the Waddell and Swan families. Please continue to pray for Jean Hill and Richard Pearson who are still in the hospital and for Rob Buckler who is struggling to hold on to the kidney he received in March of this year.

The Lord's Prayer

An Ancient Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

*"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace."*

Mid-Week Personal Devotional

Pastor Stephen Ridge

The Servant of the LORD and The Woman at the Well

Isaiah 49:5,6, 8-10

*And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his Servant, to bring Jacob back to him;
and that Israel might be gathered to him - for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and God has become my strength -*

*He says : "It is too light a thing that you should be my Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;*

I will make you a light for the nations, that my salvation will reach to the ends of the earth.

...Thus says the LORD: "In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you;

*I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion desolate heritages,
saying to the prisoners, 'Come out,' to those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves!'*

They shall feed along the byways and their pasture shall be on all the bare heights.

They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them.

For he who has pity on them will lead them and by springs of water he will guide them.

The story of the Samaritans can be said to have begun in the days of Isaiah the Prophet about 700 years before Christ. For a long time, the northern tribes of Israel had lost their way, worshipping the Baal's and Ashtoreth's who had been foisted on them by their Syro-Phoenician neighbors, and ignoring the pleas and warnings of prophets like Elijah and Elisha. By Isaiah's day, matters had come to a head and ten of Israel's twelve tribes were swept away to Assyria. Even the two surviving southern tribes were overrun by the Assyrians and only the direct intervention of God kept the Assyrians outside Jerusalem's walls and away from Israel's temple. But Israel's northern capital, Samaria, was entirely overrun and destroyed.

It was the catastrophe prophesied by Moses if God's people should ever forget their love for the LORD and sell their souls to worship pagan gods and goddesses and forsake the moral and spiritual disciplines Israel had learned from Moses at Mt. Sinai. So the question Isaiah was sent to address was "What happens now that Israel has failed to be the blessing to "*all the families on earth*" that God had promised Abraham his children would be?" And the answer Isaiah would provide was that, even in failure, God would use Israel to be his servant to reach and save the nations. More to the point, one Man, one particular Servant would arise from God's people and become all those things that old Israel's sins rendered them unable to be.

So, for twenty chapters of his book, Isaiah would see vision after vision and sing song after song about a humble Servant of the LORD who would save God's people, beginning with Israel, by suffering the catastrophe that God has reserved for every soul who would fail to love him and refuse to obey his ways. Isaiah's Servant Visions would culminate in chapter 53 of his book when he sang about God's Servant:

*"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief;
and, as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.
Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken by God and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace..."*

For twenty chapters, Isaiah sang about one particular Servant "formed" from "the womb" to be that Savior who would accomplish Israel's mission by reaching past Israel's borders and offering light and life and love to people who otherwise would have perished unwarned about judgment and un-encouraged to seek forgiveness from a God who only wants us to love and obey him from the heart and to trust him should we ever fail. In twenty chapters, you can imagine that Isaiah prophesied about all sorts of things that Jesus would do and be in the gospels.

But I'm writing you this long, windy devotional because, last Sunday, Carl Mende saw in Isaiah 49 something I had never noticed, that the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman was prophesied some 700 years before it took place in John's gospel. Here, Jesus appeared to the woman, not as a mighty Savior ruling and judging everyone in sight, but as a bedraggled, thirsty man who starts from a position of weakness to offer salvation to a woman far from God's will and estranged from God's people.

Isaiah had prophesied that the Servant of the LORD would "*apportion desolate heritages.*" Surely, in those days, there were few heritages more desolate than that of the Samaritans. In a world where racial pedigree meant everything, she was a half breed. In an environment where personal, sexual tidiness was paramount, she had failed five times at marriage and all but given up the attempt. Her mind was in bondage to a doctrine that was simply wrong, her resume was such that no orthodox synagogue would consider her for membership. And none of that was excused by Jesus, yet he welcomed her nevertheless. Christ invited her to "*Come out!*" from the errors that imprisoned her, to "*show*" herself to her neighbors as a witness whose story demanded attention, and, best of all, he promised her "*the springs of water*" that belong to people who will trust a Savior and welcome his Spirit, all things Isaiah knew God's Servant would offer centuries before the fact.