

March 15, 2020

Prayers and Devotions for Home Use Third Sunday in Lent March 15, 2020

With our church unable to meet as usual for the Service for the Lord's Day, Montreat Presbyterian Church is pleased to offer the following worship offerings for home use. For this week, our music director has selected some musical pieces linked from other sources.

In the weeks following, as we navigate our way through this uncharted territory, we will continue to look at some different ways to share worship together without being physically in the same space. This morning, we present the format we have used in recent years when winter weather has kept us from being able to gather safely.

In your worship today, and at all times, we wish you the blessings of III John 2 and 14:

*Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you
and that you may be in good health,
just as it is well with your soul.
I hope to see you soon,
and we will talk together face to face.*

K.G./V.H.

Morning Meditation

Lord, in pity and in power, Thou didst in our darkest hour
Rend the clouds and show thy light.

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

Prelude Music

{Click on the title}
"[Rest](#)" by Frank Ticheli
2011 North Carolina All State Band

Prayer of Invocation

"Prayer for a Pandemic"

May we who are merely inconvenienced
remember those whose lives are at stake.
May we who have no risk factors
remember those who are most vulnerable.
May we who have the luxury of working from home
remember those who must choose
between preserving their health or making the rent.
May we who have the flexibility
of caring for our children when their schools close
remember those who have no options.
May we who have to cancel our trips
remember those who have no safe place to go.
May we who are losing our margin money
in the tumult of the economic market
remember those who have no margin at all.
May we who settle in for a quarantine at home
remember those who have no home.
As fear grips our country
let us choose love.
During this time
when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other
let us find ways to be the loving embrace to our neighbors.

Amen.

Cameron Bellm, March, 2020. <http://krugthethinker.com/2020/03/prayer-for-a-pandemic/>

Call to Worship

O come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.
The hour is coming and is now here.
In spirit and truth, let us worship God.

Psalm 95:6; John 4:23

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A Prayer of Confession

Lord, you know who we are.
You know everything we have done.
We thirst for things that will never satisfy us.
We commit ourselves to things that will never last.
We worship things that will never bring salvation.
Still, you offer us the gift of living water.
Still, you offer us the gift of eternal life.
Forgive us, O Lord,
and give us this living water,
so that we may never thirst again. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of the Lord
is from everlasting to everlasting.
In Christ, we are forgiven.
May the God of all mercy,
who forgives us our sins,
strengthen us in all goodness,
and, by the power of the Holy Spirit,
keep us in eternal life. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

God who calls your scattered children together,
You who are Word, Light, and Bread,
Only Source of Living Water:
Give us that water now, we pray, in your living word.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Reading from the Psalter

Psalm 24:1-6

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,

the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.
Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.
They will receive blessing from the Lord,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Reading from the Gospels

The reading is printed below. If you would like to see and hear it read from the pastor's study, please [click here](#).

John 4:5-42

So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with 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 no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 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 have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

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."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."

"Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'?"

"But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."

So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word.

They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

The scripture passage is from the New Revised Standard Version.

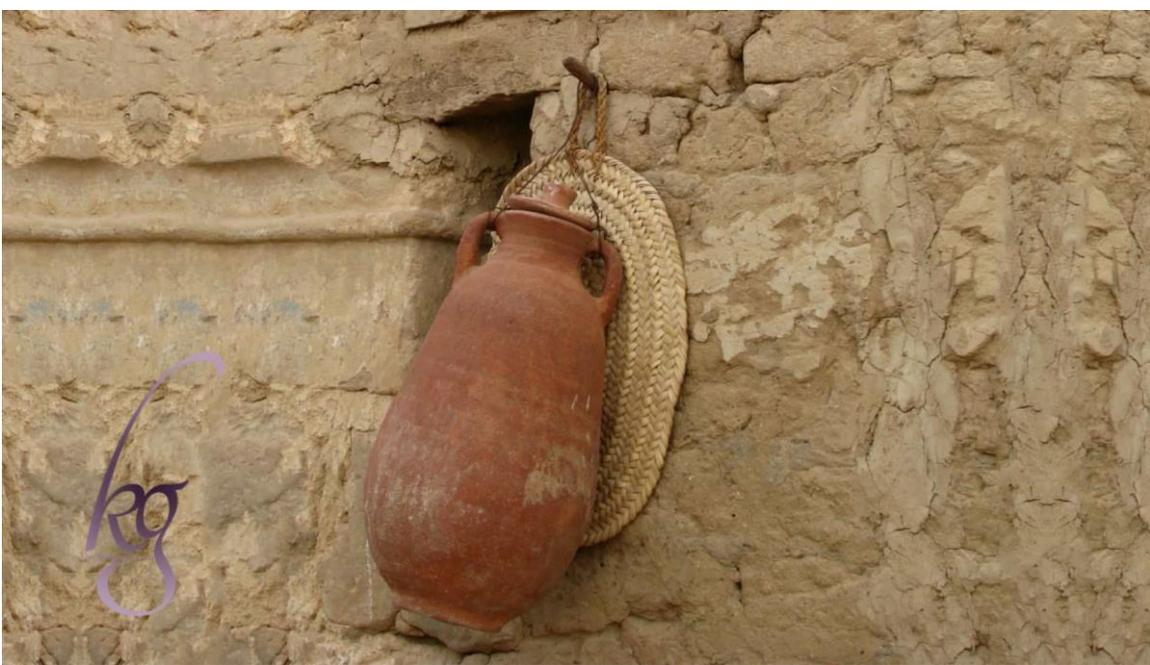
Anthem

[Come to me, O Weary Traveler](#)

William Rowan/Sylvia Dunstan

Second Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis

Sermon



For an audio recording of this sermon, [click here](#).

Self-Quarantine and Social Distance (John 4:5-42)

Talk about social distancing.

No one in their right mind would voluntarily come to draw water in the middle of the day, under that scorching Middle Eastern sun.

Almost certainly that's why no one else is around at the moment.

And, presumably, it's why she is.

Under the best circumstances, the bucket is always the inescapable taskmaster: always demanding service, always requiring labor, never allowing a day off or giving so much as a pat on the back.

You never stop needing water.

The water jar represents the unavoidable labor of the day: the long slog to and from the well; the work; the weight; the tedium, and the task itself is only a tiny fraction of the daily work to be

done.

That's true under the best of conditions and even normal conditions-when, like most people, you go to draw water at the logical time: in the morning dew at the grey light of dawn, or at the cooling retreat and the deepening blue sky of the evening. It's already enough of a chore at those times.

Going to the well under the midday sun multiplies that burden by a factor that only depends on how scorching it is on that day.

The only time you would go there at the middle of the day is if you're in a state of emergency; or if, say, you felt like the best thing you could do-for yourself and, maybe, for others-was to self-quarantine.

Why does she find it necessary to come to draw water when no one else is going to be around? Why surpass ordinary social distancing and go straight to self-quarantine?

Based on the reputation we are led to believe someone with her history may have had, maybe she's just had enough.

Maybe she's had enough of the looks and the whispers and the condescension from people who don't even know you, don't know a thing about you, but boy are they ready to pass judgment.

Maybe they don't talk directly to her. But she knows the looks; the quiet, ridiculing laughs; the imposed isolation.

"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?" says Psalm 24, "and who shall stand in God's holy place?"

"Those who have clean hands and pure hearts."

Nobody else can judge the purity of her heart. But they clearly don't trust those hands.

Maybe it feels like she can't wash them enough-like she can't sing the Happy Birthday song enough times while she's

scrubbing-to convince the people around her that it's OK for them to come a little closer, that they don't have to back away in fear every time she comes near.

Get enough of that feeling, and pretty soon you learn that social distancing is just easier if you impose your own quarantine on yourself.

So, she waits until the hour when she knows it will just be her, when no one will be around to judge, or give her any more grief than she's already had--

no one to remind her how different she feels, how unacceptable she thinks she is to the rest of the world-especially the suddenly hazardous world around her.

This is such an unusual moment. I saw an article the other day, when all the college sports tournaments were being cancelled. An anonymous college basketball coach was quoted as saying something that speaks for all of us when he said,

"This is such new territory. You don't know how to act. There is no handbook on this. It's not like we can go back and reference what we did in the past." [i]

There may be a few references, but he is definitely right about this being new territory, and about the need to relearn how to act-I mean, a nation full of people of extremely high achievement is being taught how to wash our hands, which we kind of thought we had mastered around age 3.

And there is no handbook. I've had more meetings with people in the last week than in the rest of the last year combined, and we're all in that zone of just trying to figure out how we can be most faithful to God and each other-what's the best thing to do, and what are the hundred ramifications of each decision, and how do we offset the most painful parts of it?

One of my clergy colleagues told me on Wednesday that for the passing of the peace last Sunday at their church, maintaining the requisite social distance of six feet from each other, they made

the peace sign, and if they wanted to show enthusiasm, they'd do jazz hands.

And so, in the heat of the blazing sun, she comes to the ancestral well to draw her water, and Jesus is there, and the first thing he says to her is: "Give me a drink of water."

That used to strike me as kind of rude. How about, "May I please have a drink of water?" or "May I prevail upon you, if you could be so very kind, to draw a bit of water, and if you would, to share it with me?"

But I have realized that that's not always the way we talk when we are presenting ourselves as vulnerable friends.

We say, "Share your wisdom with me."

"Help me understand."

"Pray for me."

I see, says Jesus, that you are one whom I am not supposed to speak with and you are from a people with whom my people do not share things and that you have a personal history that makes you dubious company.

I see that in at least one sense, the world does not believe that you have clean hands, let alone a pure heart.

And I'm asking you, in your state of quarantine, with those hands, to let me share the same water that you will drink from your own water jar.

And I want to offer you the water of life that only God can give.

Let me need you as much as you need me today, and let us together bring this holy water abundantly into the world.

A prayer by Macrina Wiederkehr:

Jesus, I come to the warmth of your Presence

knowing that You are
the very emptiness of God.
I come before You
holding the water jar of my life.
Your eyes meet mine
and I know what I'd rather not know.

I came to be filled
but I am already full.
I am too full.
This is my sickness
I am full of things
that crowd out
Your healing Presence.

A holy knowing steals inside my heart
and I see the painful truth.
I don't need more
I need less
I am too full.

I am full of things that block out
Your golden grace.
I am smothered by gods of my own creation
I am lost in the forest of my false self
I am full of my own opinions and narrow attitudes
full of fear, resentment, control
full of self pity, and arrogance.
Slowly this terrible truth pierces my heart,
I am so full, there is no room for You.

Contemplatively, and with compassion,
You ask me to reach into my water jar.
One by one, Jesus, you enable me
to lift out the things
that are a hindrance to my wholeness.
I take each on to my heart,
I hear You asking me
"Why is this so important to you?"

Like the murmur of a gentle stream

I hear You calling,
"Let go, let go, let go!"
I pray with each obstacle
tasting the bitterness and grief
it has caused.

Finally
I sit with my empty water jar
I hear you whisper
You have become a space for God
Now there is hope
Now you are ready to be a channel of Life.
You have given up your own agenda
There is nothing left but God.[ii]

He is our loving savior in ordinary time, and he offers living water in strange and disorienting times-times when we're afraid or anxious or discombobulated, and have been overloaded on this one story for too long.

Something is going on here: something that our mundane world of going to the well to draw daily water only begins to suggest,

something deep and infinite and powerful, something which is only available through an introspective and profoundly meaningful relationship with our Creator.

Jesus comes to all of us who are in our own ways isolated, socially distant, quarantined,

and he offers us living water, and accepts a drink from our tainted, faithful, trusting hands.

[i]<https://247sports.com/college/indiana/Article/coronoavirus-COVID-19-spring-recruiting-college-basketball-recruiting-impact-college-coaches-144997650/>

[ii] Macrina Wiederkehr, "The Prayer of the Empty Water Jar," in Wiederkehr, *Seasons of Your Heart* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 32-33.

Prayers of Intercession

IN OUR PRAYERS:

Sally Baisley (Christina Tutterow's mom), recovering from stroke

Evelyn Bannerman

Glenn Bannerman

Ken Boyer

Sylvia Boyer

Connie Bristow (friend of Genie Sullivan)

Jey Deifell

David Duncan, continuing severe back pain

Andrew Flake (friend of Ann DuPre Rogers)

Jane Frist

Ken Grogg (Keith's brother), upcoming surgery

Fred Hale

Bob Hare

Margaret Linton

Scotty MacAliley

Susan Maffett, recovering from knee replacement

Bev MacSherry, cancer

Betsy Neville

Gordon Neville

Kitty Peterson, pneumonia

Margaret Rada

Ellen Ramsey

George Ramsey

Bob Shaw

Belle Shipley (Susan Holcomb's mother), broken hip;

surgery Sunday morning, March 15

Linda Shortridge

Arline Taylor

Maggie Tuggle

Lamar Williamson

We also lift up in prayer...

All who are affected, directly or indirectly, by the coronavirus

All victims of war and destruction

Neighbors vulnerable to poverty, hunger and cold weather

Victims of domestic violence

Refugees fleeing war, famine and gangs

Parents and children separated from each other

Clara Hare-Grogg, our Young Adult Volunteer in the Philippines
(See the link to Clara's blog in "Contact Information," below)
Elmarie & Scott Parker, our Mission Co-workers in the Middle East
Victor and Sara Makari, our Mission Co-workers in Palestine
Ardrishaig Parish Church, our eco-partner church in Scotland

Black Mountain Counseling Center
Bounty & Soul
Children & Friends
Rev. Deanna Hollas, PC(USA) Gun Violence Minister
Kairos Prison Ministry
OFCB ministries and the people of Haiti
Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry
Yokefellow Prison Ministry

A Prayer for Dedication of Offerings

God of all righteousness,
receive these gifts of gratitude,
the offerings of our lives.
Purify them with your refining fire
so that they may serve your purposes
and shine with your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Closing Music

[The Lord Bless you and Keep You](#)
Peter Lutkin, The Westminster College Choir

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