

KEEP CALM & CARRY ON

3/15/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Live Streamed*)

Lent 3 (A): Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I wonder how many of you have one of those coffee mugs that say: "Keep calm and carry on" on it. Some of you probably have cocktail napkins, or oven mitts...maybe a shopping bag with the motto: "Keep calm and carry on." We probably all need to be wearing t-shirts with the phrase across our chests these days, so that as we madly search for toilet paper in the grocery store, we look at each other and are reminded: "Keep calm and carry on."

Richard's going to need one of those mugs soon! Here at St. Andrew's, we have appreciated his excellent preaching, his heart-felt pastoral care, and his encyclopedia-like knowledge of church and Biblical history, as well as his ability to build strong communities. What a gift he has been to us! Although we get to keep him for 1/4 time, we will miss him.

Tomorrow he begins the transition to his new role. He'll no longer be our full-time associate, he'll be the vicar...spiritual leader...of Holy Cross-Carlsbad, and the buck will stop with him. As ready as he is for this new role, there will be many days, when he'll need to remember: "Keep calm and carry on."

It seems to me that no matter who you are, one of the key components of being able to "keep calm and carry on," is having enough information. We can't make good decisions without information. And then, even if we don't have all the information, we can at least make a more informed plan of action.

We've been doing that as a church-body all week long, as we take precautions to help keep the most vulnerable, to this pandemic, free from exposure. Then, once the decision is made, there's a certain amount of freedom. In the limits of something like self-quarantine, comes the freedom of peace of mind.

As Christians, we have a unique source of peace and calm, and that, of course, is in God. Today's Gospel reading refers to that source as "Living Water". And I have to say, the Samaritan Woman is the epitome of "keeping calm and carrying on." And, as I just mentioned, a key component of her getting to that place is gathering information.

There she is, a woman alone at a well, and this man she's never met before approaches her. He's a man without a bucket, so he obviously has not come to the well for water. And it's not that Jesus might have looked like a threatening person, but it's clear that she can tell he's Jewish. The social norms of the time would have dictated he not speak to her for a whole host of reasons. But he talks to her, so she asks questions.

Their conversation starts to resemble a game of verbal volleyball. In fact, their dialogue reminds me of the kind of flirtatious word dance people do while they build up enough trust to actually touch. As Jesus and the Samaritan woman dance with words, they hold their ground as equals, and he avoids taking on the role of teacher. Instead, he basically entices her, getting her to ask for more and more information.

Jesus tells the woman about the gift of “living water”, which he promises will quench her thirst like no water has ever done. In his description of “living water” Jesus explains, that, within her, it will be like a spring of water “gushing up” with eternal life. The Greek roots of those words—living water and eternal life—indicate a sense of a never-ending vitality—an ever-renewing fountain of sorts. And what Jesus indicates is that God knows us, and when we know God, we, too, experience this living water inside of us.

As Jesus continues enticing the Samaritan Woman with such knowledge, he basically plays a trick on her to show how deeply known she is. He tells her to go get her husband, and, in complete honesty, she replies, “I have no husband.” Can you imagine the look on her face when Jesus says, “You are right in saying ‘I have no husband,’ because you’ve had five, and the one you’re with right now isn’t your husband”?

From what we know about that time in history, understanding she has had five husbands, and that she’s not married to her current partner, reinforces the point that others would not have found her worthy of Jesus’ attention, nor worthy of the gift he so freely offers. Yet, Jesus doesn’t proceed by granting her forgiveness, and or telling her not to sin anymore. Instead, his words and actions forge together to communicate she is fully accepted—just as she is—and that telling the truth is enough.

Just think how overwhelming that must have felt; to meet a complete stranger in the middle of nowhere and have them tell you they know who you are—all of who you are. The Samaritan Woman’s story helps us realize there is nothing we need hide from God.

And, that’s what this season of Lent is all about. God knows us; we just need to stop pretending there is anything we can keep from God, and instead turn our full focus back to God, in whom we find living water gushing through us.

A number of years ago, I read an interview with Ram Das, who was a well-known spiritual teacher, describing his own conversion. He explained how, before that moment—though he hadn’t consciously been aware of it—he had kept places in his head he imagined were somehow private from even God. But that once he realized God knows us completely, he was free. He said, “Suddenly I realized that God knew everything that was going on in my head, all the time, and that God still loved me.”

I imagine that’s how the Samaritan woman felt: “Once you realize God knows everything, you’re free”...and that even though she didn’t have any words for her experience, she felt absolutely “known” by God through this man named Jesus. Then, as Jesus sees her fully, she begins to see him; As he knows her, she begins to recognize who he is and replies, “You are a prophet.”

And what does she do next? She keeps calm and carries on with the action of any good disciple. She leaves her jar at the well and goes to share her experience with others. At the same time, we see that she isn’t yet 100% convinced about who Jesus is, as she asks her fellow townspeople, “He can’t be the Messiah, can he?” On some level, she’s still gathering information. But she relays what she knows so far: “He told me everything I have ever done”. In other words she’s saying, “He knows me at my core, and he still gave me the gift of living water!”

So, as it turns out, being a good disciple doesn’t require being sin-free; a good disciple doesn’t have to have all the information, and it’s absolutely okay to question the messenger. What is required of a good disciple—what is required of us—is that we be willing to reveal our deepest truth and in doing so, be completely known by God.

This living water is described by the Apostle Paul in our reading from Romans in a slightly different way. His words are another helpful reminder in our current attempts to keep calm and carry on during times of trial, tribulation and pandemic. He writes: “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.”

“God's love has been poured into our hearts”...that is Living Water! This week as you post on Facebook and Instagram, have Facetime chats with friends, or email workmates, I challenge you to consider how you might share the Good News of God’s Living Water with others.

May you also experience the freedom found in knowing that you are completely known by God. You are God’s beloved...just as you are. Keep calm and carry on.

-AMEN

The Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “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.” The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Psalm 95

- 1 Come, let us sing to the LORD; *
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving *
and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.
- 3 For the LORD is a great God, *
and a great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the caverns of the earth, *
and the heights of the hills are his also.

- 5 The sea is his, for he made it, *
and his hands have molded the dry land.
- 6 Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, *
and kneel before the LORD our Maker.
- 7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. *
Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!
- 8 Harden not your hearts,
as your forebears did in the wilderness, *
at Meribah, and on that day at Massah,
when they tempted me.
- 9 They put me to the test, *
though they had seen my works.
- 10 Forty years long I detested that generation and said, *
"This people are wayward in their hearts;
they do not know my ways."
- 11 So I swore in my wrath, *
"They shall not enter into my rest."

Romans 5:1-11

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.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

John 4:5-42

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."