

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
MARCH 12, 2023
"GIVE US WATER"



ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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*Please stand if comfortably able
and respond with words in bold print

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WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRELUDE: “The Old Rugged Cross” George Bennard

COLLECTION OF PENNIES FOR MISSION:

One Great Hour of Sharing

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: God of sea and sky, you keep the earth flourishing.

Many: We come before you weary from traveling through barren lands.

One: Holy One, you give water that sustains body and spirit.

Many: You hydrate us when we need, how we need.

One: Miracle Worker, you caused a rock to crack and bring forth water.

Many: Crack our hearts open and let your love flow from them like a spring.

***INVOCATION:** Holy One, we are thankful for who you are and all that you are. Your presence is desired here. We take joy in knowing that you are as close to us as our next breath. We thirst for you. May we be filled to overflowing with your love. Amen

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 307**

“Glorious Things of You are Spoken”

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Enduring Presence, we confess that sometimes we question if you are among us or not. Sometimes we quarrel with you when we are tested. These are the moments when our outlook needs transformation. You

are gracious in looking beyond our faults to see our needs and meet them. Thank you for your immeasurable grace. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

New mercies are granted daily and every day we have an opportunity to be changed forever and for good. Amen.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near.
As it was from the start so it shall be forever,
One God always here. (repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

FIRST TESTAMENT READING: Exodus 17:1-7

Water from a rock

17 The whole Israelite community broke camp and set out from the Sin desert to continue their journey, as the LORD commanded. They set up their camp at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people argued with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why are you arguing with me? Why are you testing the LORD?"

³But the people were very thirsty for water there, and they complained to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"

⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with this people? They are getting ready to stone me."

⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of Israel's elders with you. Take in your hand the

shepherd's rod that you used to strike the Nile River, and go. ⁶I'll be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Hit the rock. Water will come out of it, and the people will be able to drink." Moses did so while Israel's elders watched. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites argued with and tested the LORD, asking, "Is the LORD really with us or not?"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 95 Page 683-684

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, we have peace with God

⁵Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory. ³But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, ⁴endurance produces character, and character produces hope. ⁵This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. ⁷It isn't often that someone will die for a righteous person, though maybe someone might dare to die for a good person. ⁸But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us. ⁹So, now that we have been made righteous by his blood, we can be even more certain that we will be saved

from God's wrath through him. ¹⁰ If we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life? ¹¹ And not only that: we even take pride in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, the one through whom we now have a restored relationship with God.

***GOSPEL: John 4:5-42**

⁵ He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." ⁸ His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food.

⁹ The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with each other.)

¹⁰ Jesus responded, "If you recognized God's gift and who is saying to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would be asking him and he would give you living water."

¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water? ¹² You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!"

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, get your husband, and come back here."

¹⁷ The woman replied, "I don't have a husband." "You are right to say, 'I don't have a husband,'" Jesus answered. ¹⁸ "You've had five husbands, and the man you are with now isn't your husband. You've spoken the truth."

¹⁹ The woman said, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you and your people say that it is necessary to worship in Jerusalem."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You and your people worship what you don't know; we worship what we know because salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the time is coming—and is here!—when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. ²⁴ God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth."

²⁵ The woman said, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will teach everything to us.”

²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I Am—the one who speaks with you.”

²⁷ Just then, Jesus’ disciples arrived and were shocked that he was talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” ²⁸ The woman put down her water jar and went into the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ “Come and see a man who has told me everything I’ve done! Could this man be the Christ?” ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus.

³¹ In the meantime the disciples spoke to Jesus, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

³² Jesus said to them, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.”

³³ The disciples asked each other, “Has someone brought him food?”

³⁴ Jesus said to them, “I am fed by doing the will of the one who sent me and by completing his work. ³⁵ Don’t you have a saying, ‘Four more months and then it’s time for harvest’? Look, I tell you: open your eyes and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest. ³⁶ Those who harvest are receiving their pay and gathering fruit for eternal life so that those who sow and those who harvest can celebrate together. ³⁷ This is a true saying, that one sows and another harvests.

³⁸ I have sent you to harvest what you didn’t work hard for; others worked hard, and you will share in their hard work.”

³⁹ Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman’s word when she testified, “He told me everything I’ve ever done.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ Many more believed because of his word, ⁴² and they said to the woman, “We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world.”

MESSAGE: “Who/What are part of the world?”

Reflections on “God so loved the world”

Last week we heard in our scripture, John 3:16, the famous verse that many claim as the basic truth about God. Today I’d like to talk about the first five words of that verse; “God so loved the world.” Who or what exactly is “the world?”

Let’s think about that for a few minutes.

What is the world? Is it a place? Is it the whole earth? If we believe that God created the whole earth, do we believe that every grain of sand, every leave on a tree, every drop of water in a stream, poison ivy and wildflowers, (bad and good) were created by God?

If so, what about the places on the earth that we would not want to visit; that we call evil or worthless? The hottest deserts and the coldest ends of the earth; all extremes of physical places.

Today’s lesson tells us about a place call Samaria, that most Jews want to avoid. It’s probably not the

geographically region that Jews don't like, it's the people who live in this part of the world, Samaria, that Jews don't like. However, the scripture says that God loved the world.

What about the people God has placed on this world? God loved them. Last week our story was about Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Many places in our New Testament Jesus speaks badly of Pharisees. However, it's probably not the persons themselves, but what Pharisees do to the average Jew at that time in history. Pharisees make it difficult for anyone to see and feel the love of Jesus. Yet God loves these people who live in the world, the people who others shun. "God so loved the world".

What about the Samaritan woman at the well that we heard in our readings today? She lived in a region that Jews avoided if they could. Samaria is between Galilee and Judea where the temple is in the city of Jerusalem. Many Jews traveled around Samaria instead of through when they traveled between Jerusalem and Galilee, even though it would take their journey double the time.

The rift between the Jews and the Samaritans has a complex history. Considered outsiders and even idolaters by the Jews, the Samaritans nevertheless understood themselves to be descendants of the northern kingdom. The name means "keeper of the law," and the Samaritans held to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). as their Scripture.

Both Jews and Samaritans trace their lineage back to Abraham and his descendants. Their place of worship was Mount Gerizim over against Jerusalem. It seems that

Samaria would be the last place, not the first place, for Jesus to go to show God's love for the world. But he did.

That Jesus "had to" go through Samaria is better translated "it was necessary for him" to go through Samaria. This detail is not a geographical but a theological necessity. That Jesus must travel through Samaria is stipulated by John 3:16, "For God so loved the world." Jesus needed to minister to the Samaritans as well as everyone else.

The disciples, the hearers of this Gospel, need to know what and who the world is. The "world" is not a general claim about God's love, or a universal description of God's positive inclination toward new believers. Rather, the world represents the entirety of God's creation, including those who cannot imagine themselves as objects of God's love.

There is nothing in God's creation that God does not love, even the least anticipated persons. God loves even those on the margins, the peripheries, the outer boundaries of the centralized community. The fact that Jesus is with the woman at the well confirms that God's love is for those on the outside of the religious center. This is good news for those in our congregations today who feel unworthy of God's affection and abundant love.

Where do we find ourselves today in God's world? Do we know we are loved, no matter what? Do we treat God's earth with love? Do we recycle and not litter, for example, and treat God's world with respect however we can? The hard question is how do we treat other people? In our story the Jews and Samaritans have been carrying on their

“feud” for many generations. Can’t they love each other even when they worship God in a different way?

Why do some people today hate people of color, Jews, Asian people, immigrants, etc? Whatever happened in the history of our country, (blacks treated as non-persons, World War II, how immigrants were treated when our ancestors came to the United States, how my great grandfather thought about the Irish or the Germans or the English, etc.) Old grudges. Old ideas about certain types of people. If God loves the world, **ALL** people are included – not just the ones **WE THINK ARE WORTHY OF LOVE.**

Can you and I stop this “feud” about who in the world God loves and who in the world God doesn’t love? **After all, there is no one in the world who God doesn’t love, so there is nothing we should fight or feud or discredit or look down on in our world at all.** Think about it. **Amen.**

SPECIAL MUSIC: St. John Choir “The Gift of Love”

Hal H. Hopson

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with silent personal prayer
Gracious God, source of life, we come to worship as those who have found a spring of water and return to satisfy our thirst again and again. Refresh our spirits by your Spirit; through Jesus Christ, your Son. And we are grateful that you care for us even in our brokenness. Praise be for your graciousness.

God of all nations, forgive our biases and prejudices, our refusal to have dealings with those of other races and

orientations of which we do not approve. Excuse our religious one-upmanship that seeks to exalt our own persuasion at the expense of others and that would rather debate non-essentials than find common ground and concerned action. We are convinced that we are right, and stubborn in resisting any evidence that we should change our minds. Soften such hardness of heart with the warm love of your Spirit.

We pray for our nation and for our state and community, that we may be united in our commitment to liberty and justice for all. Preserve truth, widen understanding, encourage dialogue, facilitate negotiation of differences, and prosper our farms and industries.

God of health and peace, give peace to troubled minds and anxious hearts. Be with those who struggle for wholeness in their physical and mental health. We especially pray for those on our prayer list. Comfort the bereaved and heal those who are sick. Receive into ultimate peace those who are dying.

Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore, “God is great!” We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus . . .

THE LORD’S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into

temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 769 “Hear Our Prayer”

**Hear our prayer, O God, Hear our prayer, O God;
Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

God gives of Godself freely, so let us give freely to God. Let us bring gifts that sustain the life of the kingdom. May these resources be more than enough. Amen.

OFFERTORY: “God So Loved the World” John Stainer

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

Fount of Blessing, receive our gifts in the joy that we give them. Be it time, tithe, or talent, it all comes from you. Thank you for blessing us to be a blessing to you and each other. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: NCH 596 “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me”**

***BENEDICTION:**

As you depart this space, remember that the God who caused water to flow from a rock is the same God who

walks with you. Go forth with the assurance that in the midst of a chaotic world something good can happen and something good will happen. Amen.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE:**

“Let There Be Peace on Earth”

***POSTLUDE: “With Sounding Brass” Chester Bordman**