

**2020 03 13 Toronto United Mennonite Church**  
**Show us the Rock of our Salvation, our Source of Living Water**

[Exodus 17:1-7](#) - God tells Moses to strike the rock and water comes out for the people.

[John 4:5-42](#) - Conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be ever acceptable in your sight, God our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I tend to think that it all comes down to planning. Whenever we want to predict how a person or a group will respond in times of crisis, we look at their preparation. Did they have a plan? Had they practiced the plan? Had they brainstormed alternatives and roleplayed options? *I am a fan of the plan, that's just the kind of man I am.* How will people act in emergencies? They will act the way that they are prepared to act.

And the events of this week have brought me again and again to planning. Planning with Pastor Michele, with the Caring Team, with the Board and with many members of this community. Planning with Nathaniel as we tweaked and adapted our expectations of this Sunday. Planning with colleagues in the GTA Mennonite Ministerial, with priests, pastors, and ministers of other denominations, with my neighbours, friends, and each appointment on my calendar to work out how to navigate the needs of this time.

What an experience to read the Church Pandemic Resource materials prepared by Mennonite Church Canada years ago. There is a comfort in knowing that others took the time to anticipate the reality we are facing now. I would encourage you to **read the letter from church leaders** exploring the historical and theological need to prepare for situations like this. *'Others have laboured, and we enter into their labour'*

Likewise, I have seen how the systems and networks of this congregation are mobilized to provide care, contact and spiritual support. It probably doesn't feel like Pandemic Preparation when we play crokinole together, go hiking in groups, or humbly accept victory in epic borscht battles. But there we are - forming a community connected with bonds of joy, memory, and fellowship.

Planning and preparation are such critical elements of success, and if I had my way I would spend these few moments of sermon time either repeating that message, or more likely, organizing us into phone chains and meal programs. So it is a double annoyance that this is not what the scripture shows us. **Instead we have stories where nobody seems to have planned anything, or thought ahead, or prepared at all!**

The people of Egypt are free at last and it starts well - they are travelling 'by stages' which all sounds very organized. And then they come to camp out in the wilderness, and understandably aghast that there is no water to be found. They demand to know what Moses' plan is. After all, who would bring all these people out into the desert without knowing what they could drink? In common with other stories like these, God provides for the needs of the people, but not before Moses gets exasperated and asks for divine help. What follows is the miracle of the water from the rock. God is reaffirmed as the true leader and provider of the people, and Moses is left the task of naming the place, remembering the question *'Is the LORD among us or not?'* Since no one actually asks that question, we identify this as the question being asked, when people feel thirst, and fear for the lives of their children. Is God with us? Can rocks produce water?

Generations later, the Gospel of John records Jesus heading home to Galilee, apparently one step ahead of his Pharisee critics. He takes a shortcut through Samaritan lands, and finds a well to rest by while the disciples go out to find some food. But wouldn't you know it, he has no way of getting the water, and the first Samaritan woman who comes by has no trouble rubbing his nose in it. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman becomes the most vibrant theological debate recorded in the gospel. Students of scripture have explored the text from many angles, wondering what to read into this exchange. Was this ponderous religious exchange, or

flirtatious banter? Was the woman being challenging and aggressive, or cautiously evasive? Was Jesus trying to impress her, convert her, or just get himself something to drink?

*If you want to get deeper into it, let's have an online Bible study this week!*

I will pass over the strange matter of her extra husbands, except to say that Jesus does not seem to be naming a sin here, and there is no need to assume that this woman is trying to avoid her community members out of shame, even though that would make a great metaphor about self-isolation. But don't despair, we can assume that she is out here at noon because she practices diligent regular handwashing.

Jesus tells her that he can give her Living Water, and that it does not just quench thirst for one drink, but becomes a spring, like water flowing constantly from the rock for the good of all the community. And indeed this woman leaves behind her water jug, her implement, like the disciples leaving behind their fishing nets, and goes to spread the word among her friends and family.

It is thought that this story was included in the Gospel because the writer's community contained both Jewish and Samaritan followers of Jesus, different ethnic groups and different genders, living together as equals. The story reminds the Jewish men that it was not through their action that Samaritans were baptized, but it was the work of this woman bringing Living Water from Jesus himself, while the disciples were waiting in line for groceries. Just as the Exodus story answers the question 'is God with us?', so this story tells these early believers 'Jesus has come to all of us, without partiality'.

What is consistent about both of these stories is real, physical peril. Jesus is on the run, tired and unwelcome. The people of Israel are in the wilderness, afraid for their children. Moses cries to God that they are about ready to stone him. God brings water from the rock. God sends a woman to meet Jesus.

These stories are both about God's generosity and provision in peril, revealing the grace that awaits us. In our own peril, we need to pray 'show us the Rock of our Salvation, our source of Living Water'.

*I saw a woman approach another seated on the subway  
Crouch down, take off her mask to say  
Did you know your shoelace is undone  
And because of the physics involved  
Because of the impulse to serve  
Because of love's reaching out  
She offered, and was accepted  
To bend down and tie that stranger's shoe  
The stranger woman saying thank you  
sorry, thank you, sorry  
And me, amazed, onlooking.  
#LoveInTheTimeOfCOVID19 is the same as love has ever been  
Remarkable  
Unnerving  
Salvific  
As necessarily profound as a drink of water.*

Where have you seen grace this week? Where have you seen acts of love? I didn't know that self-isolation could be an act of love, an act of mutual aid, of community care, of diligence and sacrifice... an action in keeping with God's Spirit.

Acts of care follow from spiritual relationships. The woman who came across Jesus knew that whatever sectarian and theological differences they had, there was an elemental relationship, thirst, water, the opportunity of the host to welcome the stranger. The people of Israel did not yet trust in God, but Moses did, and in the heart of desperation he knew how to reach out.

Our church gathers to follow Jesus, to worship our Creator, to give thanks and to invite the Holy Spirit to inspire our works. Usually we gather on a Sunday morning. For the next little while, our gatherings will look a bit different. We will still sing, pray, joke and argue, but we will do this in different ways, with technologies new and old. Our service will not be gathering in a room, but dispersing to feed and support those around us, offering kindness, food, and hope in the name of the always-present God.

And it turns out that these are the right scriptures for this time after all, for a faith community facing time away from this shared space, built and blessed by generations. The sign of Exodus, that God is there with us, wherever we go. The promise of Jesus, that God is not to be found on one mountain or another, but that we worship in Spirit and Truth.

We are asked to endure - times alone, times separated from one another. We will need to serve one another, and we will need to accept the service of others. Which one is more difficult for you? This is a call for the endurance of the saints.

When I saw the date I would be preaching I thought I would be speaking about our church's welcome as Public, Intentional and Explicit. I thought we would consider how we witness to a God who is generous, creative and inclusive, delighted to welcome anyone to the table. Now I see that our witness is to the goodness of the well planned meal schedule, the diligence of handwashing, the spontaneous phone call. It is in the baking of pies and the sharing of toilet roll.

This is our sudden time in the wilderness, just as Jesus was scooped up from the waters of the Jordan and plonked down for 40 days without human contact. Remember that he was not alone in the Wilderness. He had the voice of the tempter, yes. But he also had the wild animals in their wisdom with him, the angels and their comfort to minister to him, the words of scripture, and the promise of God's presence with him at all times.

This is our Lenten discipline, our wilderness retreat, this particular form that following Jesus in this world takes in your life at this time. Though we are separated, we do this together, as God's church, supporting one another. Though we cannot be together in this place, we are all connected. We are here to help each other in this time, seeking God's presence, and through that presence, seeking the good of the place where you are.

God, show us the Rock of our Salvation, from which comes Living Water. May we bear that healing, reviving, cleansing water in our souls to refresh and renew. May we be able to answer '*is God with us?*' Show us each day your presence. Amen.

**Gratitude and acknowledgement:**

*Written that you may believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, Sandra M. Schneiders

*A Biblical Case (Church Pandemic Preparation)*, prepared by Janet Plenert, Sven Eriksson & John Longhurst

*National Affirming Day* - Public, Intentional & Explicit (PIE) inclusion of LGBTQ2S+ individuals and families.

**Scriptures:**

Exodus 17:1-7

17:1 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.

17:2 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?"

17:3 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?"

17:4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

17:5 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.

17:6 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.

17:7 He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

John 4:5-42

4:5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

4:6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

4:7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

4:8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

4:9 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.)

4:10 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."

4:11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

4:12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

4:13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,

4:14 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."

4:15 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."

4:16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

4:17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';

4:18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

4:19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

4:20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

4:21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

4:22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

4:23 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.

4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

4:25 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."

4:26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

4:27 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?"

4:28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

4:29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

4:30 They left the city and were on their way to him.

4:31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."

4:32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

4:33 So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.

4:35 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.

4:36 The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

4:37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'

4:38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."

4:39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."

4:40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

4:41 And many more believed because of his word.

4:42 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."