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Rehoboth, MA  
March 15, 2020

John 4:5-42

## Hope In God's Promise

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### OPENING PRAYER

Holy and most gracious God, we know that, even in the midst of the chaos of our world today that you are still with us. That you hear our cries. That you are holding us tightly in your embrace. That you are giving us strength, wisdom and peace. Be with us today as we gather, though it may look different than we originally thought it would. Unite us, near and far. Fill us with hope in your promise – your promise that we are not alone, that that resurrection is real and that your love always wins. Amen.

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### SCRIPTURE

#### John 4:5-42 (NRSV)

<sup>5</sup>So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup>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.) <sup>10</sup>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.' <sup>11</sup>The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' <sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' <sup>13</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>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.' <sup>15</sup>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.'

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' <sup>17</sup>The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; <sup>18</sup>for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' <sup>19</sup>The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in

Jerusalem.’<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.’<sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.’<sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.’<sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’<sup>25</sup> 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.’<sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’

<sup>27</sup> 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?’<sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,<sup>29</sup> ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’<sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him.

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’<sup>32</sup> But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’<sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, ‘Surely no one has brought him something to eat?’<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.’<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.<sup>37</sup> For here the saying holds true, “One sows and another reaps.”<sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.’

<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days.<sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word.<sup>42</sup> 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 Saviour of the world.’

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## **SERMON**

### **Hope In God’s Promise**

I have really enjoyed, over the past year-and-a-half, wandering away from the lectionary and participating in sermon series – whether they were scripture-based (where we looked at a big block of scripture linearly) or thematic (where we picked a theme and then used various scriptures to touch on the different topics within that theme). It really has allowed me to elevate my preaching in such a way that ties it together from week to week. With a few exceptions here and there, *really* this is the first time in my nine years here that I have been able to create this much continuity in worship. It does not necessarily feel like we are having individual worship services in a vacuum every week,

but that there is a continuum. We are building on something every week, using lessons from prior scriptures and sermons to support and enhance what we are thinking about that week.

A few weeks ago, I was starting to get nervous about planning for my maternity leave and what that would mean for worship.

(Little did I know that would be the least of my problems.)

From a worship planning perspective, it is certainly much easier to preach from the lectionary – there are countless resources available that contain notes on the scriptures, liturgy (like calls to worship, prayers of confession, etc.), children sermon ideas and hymn suggestions. Putting together a cohesive worship service is – dare I say it? – much easier when I am preaching from the lectionary, as opposed to preaching through the lectionary and have to find all of that stuff in different places (or, in a lot of cases, create it myself) and then put it together.

Full disclosure, I opted for sanity and decided to work smarter, not harder. I decided that, during this time of transition in my life, it made sense to step back into the lectionary so that worship was still strong and cohesive, but it would be manageable for me, amidst the rest of the craziness happening

Again – of course, I did not realize, at the time, just how much craziness there would be.)

I also assumed it would make for a smoother transition for someone coming in to cover my maternity leave.

So three weeks ago – on Transfiguration Sunday, our big Mardi Gras celebration – I became a “lectionary preacher” again. And yesterday, as I was trying to gather my thoughts for today’s sermon (friends, they never talked about how to preach during global pandemic in seminary) I thought back to my sermons over the past three weeks. The crazy thing is that, even though I did not intend for this to happen (and I certainly did not know what was going to unfold in our country this week), the three sermons that I have preached over the past several weeks – even they were not necessarily “connected” – have built on one another and prepared me – prepared us – for this moment.

Three weeks ago, on Transfiguration Sunday, we were on the mountaintop with Jesus and I focused on Peter’s words to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” We reflected on why, too, it was “good for us to be here” – to be the church, to gather as a community, to know that we are not alone.

Two weeks ago, we were in the wilderness with Jesus and we believed, even though it seemed hard, even at that time, that God is with us when we, too, are in the wilderness.

And last week we held in sacred hope the truth that this world – this messy and imperfect and chaotic world – is the world that Jesus came into, the world that God believed was worth saving.

And so, friends, this morning, I want to carry these messages with you as you meet Jesus at the well.

Remember that it is good for us to be here. Even though “here” is not necessarily “together,” it is good for us to be here. It is good for us to be gathering in this virtual space, to be connecting in a way that we are able to and to be worshiping God even though we are scared and anxious and not really sure what the future will hold.

Remember that God is with us in this wilderness that we have found ourselves in. That we have not been abandoned. That there are angels with us, no matter what they might look like – whether they look like a friend who texts us an encouraging message when we are at the end of our rope or a neighbor who runs errands for someone who is high-risk and should not be out and about or a fellow patron who lets you have the last roll of toilet paper at the store.

Remember that this is the world that Jesus came into. This world - this messy and imperfect and chaotic and currently facing a global pandemic world – is the world that Jesus came into, the world that God believes is worth saving, the world whose story is scary right now, but not over yet.

And friends, I am not saying all of this because I was at a loss for words today and just decided to recycle old content. I am saying this to remind us all that God has prepared us for this moment. Our faith grounds us in a way that gives us strength, courage, wisdom, clarity and patience. Many of us think that we have no idea how we are supposed to handle what is happening in our world right now, but I truly believe that our faith will carry us through in so many different ways.

Now let us all pick up our empty buckets and meet Jesus at the well.

On Friday morning, I could not help but note the irony of this week’s lectionary passage. I was not at Jacob’s well with an empty bucket, but I was at the Swansea Target with an empty shopping cart. Like the woman in this story, I had gone for what I thought I needed – physical sustenance – but came away with far more than that.

For so many reasons, this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is an unlikely one. He is a man and she is a woman; he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan. There are real and cultural reasons why these two should never have even acknowledged one another and yet, here they are, talking about what it means to drink of the living water.

Again, the woman comes to the well for water – but she leaves with far more than that. She leaves with the promise that she can drink of this living water and never be thirsty

again. She leaves with the hope in salvation. She leaves knowing that she can worship God in spirit and truth. She leaves proclaiming the truth about Jesus, with so many other Samaritans now believing in Jesus because of her testimony.

She shows up, just looking for water – and leaves with the promise that something so much better is coming.

But friends, remember it does not happen right away. She has to wait. She has to hold onto that hope. Resurrection does not happen as soon as she walked away from Jacob's well – in fact we are still at the very beginning of the Gospel, in chapter four. It is going to take some time.

But just because the promise is not immediate does mean that it is not true.

And I feel like that is where we are today. Because now we have to wait. We have to wait in this moment of uncertainty and this moment of fear and this moment of anxiety.

And yet, this promise is still true for us. This promise that we can drink of this living water and never be thirsty again. This promise that we have hope in salvation. This promise that we can worship God in spirit and truth – even if we are doing so virtually while practicing social distancing during a global pandemic. This promise that we, too, can proclaim the truth about Jesus, with others believing because of our testimony.

Friends, while it might look different than it has in the past, now is the time to do church. Now is the time to hold fast to our faith. Now is the time to believe in what we cannot see, to shine light into the darkness of the world and to believe that God will make order out of this chaos. Now is the time to, like the woman at the well, leave our empty buckets behind and go tell the world about this promise.

And then show the world what it means.

Our lives have been turned upside down – and the scary and unsettling part right now is that we are not reacting to something that has happened and is in the past, we are living through something that is still happening and we are unsure how long it will last.

But remember, we are still encountering Jesus – I really do believe that.

I mentioned that I found myself at Target on Friday with an empty shopping cart and the need for physical sustenance and came away with far more than that. Now – did I come away with shelf-stable food, personal hygiene products, paper towels and a new Paw Patrol DVD? Yes. Yes, I did.

But I feel like I got more out of my shopping trip than that. Because I saw the kindness of strangers, as everyone helped one another (from a safe distance, of course!). I saw patience in the eyes and actions of people shopping – and gratitude for those who were working. I heard people wishing one another good luck. No one was pushing or

shoving or complaining. No one was judging other people's reactions or responses. Everyone was just sort of in the mutual place of trying to prepare for something we do not understand.

Even though we were strangers, we were all in this together.

And while we may have all left the store with full hearts, I know I, personally, left with hope in the promise that we are all going to get through this together.

This hope has only gotten stronger over the past two days as I have witnessed people on social media or reaching out to me about ways that we can all help one another through this pandemic. People have offered to run errands for their neighbors who are the most at-risk, to donate food to the food pantry and to send cards to the elderly in assisted living with restricted visitation policies.

One of the podcast hosts that I listen to said on social media yesterday that this is hard and isolating, but also super uniting and I thought there is such profound truth in that. Because we are literally all going through the same thing right now. All around our country, all around our world – we are united right now.

And so now we have to leave this “space” – this virtual space – and hold onto the same hope that the woman at the well did. Hope that resurrection is coming, even if we have to wait for it.

So, my friends, I want to remind you all to breathe. To take care of yourself – physically, but also emotionally and mentally. Stay educated, but also know your limits and step away from the media coverage if it is starting to be too much for you. Go outside – get some fresh air. Reach out to someone if you are starting to feel isolated and anxious.

And then let us do church. In a way that is safe and accessible – let us take care of the most vulnerable during this time. Even if it is just sending a card or picking up the phone and calling some of our older members who do not have internet access – that WILL make a difference.

And pray. Pray for health and safety. Pray for wisdom and guidance. Pray for patience and encouragement. Pray for strength and relief from the loneliness you might feel. Show up at that well with an empty bucket – maybe looking for one thing, but open to receive another.

Because you never know when you might encounter Jesus.

Friends, during these trying times, do not let go of God's promise to us.

It is good for us to be here today. To remember that we are not alone in this wilderness, that God believes that our world is still worth saving and that God's promise is real, even if it is not immediate.

Thanks to be to God!  
Amen.