

Things are not always as they seem
Lent III – 15 March 2020

I speak to you in the name of he who Is, who Was and who is Yet to come. Amen PBS

How many of you have ever taken a long car trip. As a child or as an adult? How many of you have ever uttered the phrase "Are we there yet"? How many of you have heard that from your own children?

Imagine Moses. He's been tasked with leading the Israelites out of Egypt, freed from slavery, to the promised land. He did not assure them of milk and honey. He did not assure them of anything other than the abiding love of God as God's chosen. So off they go. After walking for ages they "camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink". (Exodus 7.1, NRSV)

The people are not happy. They complain to Moses that there is no water to drink. It's his job to fix it. "Are we there yet?" Poor Moses.

You see, Moses has been given information on a "need to know" basis and right now, he doesn't know. Apparently God doesn't think Moses needs to know. But Moses' people want to know. And they want to know NOW!

Did you know you can live 21 days without food, yet only 3 days without water. No wonder they were cranky. When the Israelites were in captivity they disliked the environment, yet they knew they'd receive water, and food. Now they're heading away with Moses whom they don't really know all that well. He's promised them safety and freedom, but they are thirsty and hungry and at this point would go back to Pharaoh for a dipper of water and some bread to eat.

The Israelites have had it and they gather, en masse to complain to Moses. Moses is at his wits end. They were, as my Dad would say "pecking his head".

"So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." (Exodus 17.4, NRSV) Help me out here God, I'm at the end of my tether. I don't know exactly what's going on and I don't know what to tell them. Some direction would be greatly appreciated.

"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". (Exodus 17.5) Moses does as he's asked, he takes some of the elders with him, he strokes the rock and water comes out. Hooray! Moses is once again a hero!

Why take the elders? Witnesses of course. [Moses] called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Exodus 17.7, NRSV) In other words "Are we THERE yet?"

Autumn Peltier is a 15 year old "Water Warrior" from Wikemwikong First Nations in Northern Ontario. She is Ashinaabe-aski first Nation and at the age of 13 addressed world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly on the issue of water protection. She became a water advocate when, at the age of 8, she attended a ceremony at the

Serpent River and saw a sign indicating that the water was not safe to swim in or drink. It was then that she realised not everyone in Canada has access to clean water.

We live in Canada. We live in a place where we can turn on the tap and take a drink. How many of us here have ever taken a drink from the garden hose?

Of the 634 First Nations in Canada as many as 100 have water advisories at any given time. Of these more than 50 first nations have had boil water advisories for decades. Generations of First Nations children have grown up never knowing a time when it was safe to drink from the tap.

Since I've lived in Fernie we've had boil water advisories annually in the Spring that usually last about a week. Imagine living your entire life under a boil water advisory?

Today's Gospel is about the Woman at the well. We don't know her name, only that she was a Samaritan woman. What's fascinating about this story is that it breaks every societal rule of the time.

Jesus speaks to her directly. This was inappropriate. In order for Jesus to speak to her properly, she would have to be with a male relative. Preferably he would speak to the male relative first and not directly to her.

She was a Samaritan, Jesus was a Jew. Jews and Samaritans did not get along well. They did not share things with each other.

Their argument with each other went back to the 10 original tribes and the land each was assigned. The Samaritans separated themselves from the ten tribes and felt the Pentateuch belonged only to them. There are, to this day, believed to be 800 Samaritans still alive, residing mostly in Palestine.

The Samaritans felt they were above the law and better than any of the tribes, certainly descendants of Judah, the Jews. Jesus, a descendant of Judah, was a Jew.

In a typical situation, Jesus would not speak directly to the woman, especially knowing she was a Samaritan.

In a typical situation, the woman would not speak back to Jesus. She would not dare to question him or challenge him on anything he said.

This is far from a typical situation.

Jesus demands water.

The Samaritan woman chastises him for not having anything with which to get water.

Jesus tests her.

She passes the test.

Jesus tells her he can give her living water.

She gets him water that will quench his thirst.

He gives her living water and eternal life.

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?" (John 4.25-29, NRSV)

She goes back to her village and reports what she has seen.
The men of the village are astounded and wish to see this for themselves.
After meeting Jesus and hearing what he has to say they realise that their faith was tested both by the woman and by Jesus. And because of what the woman told them their belief was strengthened.

The Samaritan woman left her water jar behind. She did not need it to bring the Samaritans to the living water. For you see, she became the vessel. She told of what she saw. She told of whom she had met. And the community believed the woman, sought out Jesus, and invited him to stay.

Another taboo confronted. Jesus stayed with them, the Samaritans, for 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 Saviour of the world." John 4.41-42, NRSV)

Let's back up a little bit. When the woman was speaking with Jesus he tested her about her husband. She told the truth. She had no husband per se, yet had been married five times. Jesus did not judge her. He tested her and she was unashamed. She was not embarrassed.

This woman was also respected by her community. She told the community that Jesus knew everything about her, as would the community in which she lived. When she shared these things, they believed her and wanted to meet Jesus. Not because they didn't believe her; because they DID believe her. And their lives were changed for the better because of it.

She gave Jesus water to quench his thirst.
Jesus gave her living water.
She brought that living water to her community.
Not with shame.
Not with fear.
Simply with love and trust.

And as we continue to navigate COVID-19 and the best practices to protect ourselves and the most vulnerable we must remember to react with love and trust; not with fear.

Wash our hands. Don't touch our faces. Clean surfaces often. If sniffing or sneezing stay home and away from crowds. Use common sense. Stop buying toilet paper. You have enough. Check in on elderly or infirm neighbours to make sure they have what they need and don't feel isolated.

For now we are safe to gather in crowds of under 250 people. Which goes to show that small churches are mighty churches.

We gather, as God's faithful, to share our love.
Of God.
Of the Spirit.
Of the community.
Of each other.

With trust.
With hope.
With love.
Thanks be to God.

The Reverend Andrea L. Brennan
Pastor, Priest and Prophet
Knox United Church and Christ Church Anglican
Fernie, BC

Lent III
Exodus 17.1-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5.1-11
John 4 5.42