

Sermon notes: March 15, 2020 **Focus:** Samaritan woman (“Pray” theme) [All Readings](#)

Continuing on the Lenten themes we laid out at the beginning of Lent, I am going to focus the practice of prayer without going into detail about how to pray. Prayer by my very loose definition, shows up in the Samaritan woman’s response to Jesus in John. If you’re not sure what I am talking about regarding Lenten practices, I highly recommend you watch the overview: [Episcopal Church’s video about spiritual practices](#).

Before I dive in, I am very aware that COVID-19 is ever present on your mind. We are genuinely and appropriately concerned. Personally, I have older family members who are uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19. They are vulnerable due to advanced age, already compromised health, and underlying conditions. As a healthy almost 50 year old, I am at a pretty low risk for serious complications; but I am choosing to live and act for the vulnerable. In my opinion, this is not something to blow off as much ado about nothing.

Many of you have scoffed at the endless lines at Costco. You’ve come to the opposite conclusion that this *is* all overblown. For you as an individual, you are probably right, but look at the margins of your friends and try to live in their skin. Don’t freak, live your life, and walk in some else’s shoes while you are living well.

Another thing I have heard that mildly surprises me is courage. Some of our more seasoned members told me that they are going to live their lives as an act of courage. They know they are at risk, but chose to step out, go to events, eat out, come to church because they refuse to isolate and refuse to make fear a way of life.

So, in this present moment of COVID-19, see the world through the eyes of the vulnerable and admire their courage, and then act on their behalf. I am leading with caution. If we all do our job of prevention, we can all just think it was as overwrought as Y2K. Either way, let’s thank God and our public health officials.

Now to Lenten prayer practice I offer to you something that I hope will help you pray and worship with courage and openness- besides washing your hands twenty times a day. *One way to see prayer and worship is that they are not really that different. Prayer tends to be individual and worship tends to be in groups. But they easily blend and blur in both directions.*

Here is the series [Video on Lenten practice of Prayer](#) and a [Video on Lenten practice of Worship](#) (I won’t elaborate on worship). In the prayer video, the priest responds to a hurricane shut down in her Florida church with ‘pop up prayer.’ She facebook “live streams” morning prayer during the shutdown/evacuation of the church. We might consider trying novel ways to connect through prayer in the face of uncertainties around virus outbreaks. **You** can do the prayers you always do and share them with the world! Maybe push your technological limits to share your practices with others...you know...blurring prayer into corporate worship. I can show you how to be a tech genius!

Bible nerd stuff related to the Samaritan woman and her prayerful response to Jesus The Gospel of John has a deep metaphorical and poetic structure. I won’t go into great detail, but there are seven signs that organize the book, and the Samaritan woman is embedded between Signs 1 and 2:

1. Water into wine at Cana -- John 2:1-11
 - a. Samaritan woman
2. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum -- John 4:46-54
3. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda -- John 5:1-15
4. Feeding the 5000 -- John 6:5-14
5. Jesus walking on water -- John 6:16-24

- 6. Healing the man born blind -- John 9:1-7
- 7. The raising of Lazarus -- John 11:1-45

Between the signs the stories of Nicodemus (last week) and the Samaritan woman (this week) highlight and expand on 1 (water to wine) and 2 (healing of an official's son). There is a structure here too and it follows an ABCDA'B'C' pattern. Take a look:

- A. Water to wine in Cana – 2:1-12. **Sign 1**
- B. The leaders of Jerusalem in conflict with Jesus – 2:13-22.
- C. Nicodemus – 2:23-3:21.
- D. Jesus baptizes more than John – 3:22-4:3.
- C'. Samaritan woman – 4:4-27.

B'. Many in Sychar believe – 4:28-45.

A'. Healing of an official's son – 4:46-54. **Sign 2**

These stories move from the faithlessness of the leaders to the prayerfulness of outsiders. To drive this point home, see the side-by-side comparison:

Nicodemus	Samaritan Woman
He is well-known	She is anonymous
He scrupulously keeps purity laws	She is permanently unclean
He is a religious leader	She is a religious outsider (even among Samaritans)
He is a great teacher of truth	She believes Samaritan heresies
He is a high government official	She has no power
He is morally respectable	She is morally suspect
He seeks out Jesus at night	Jesus seeks her out at noon
He knows that Jesus is a teacher from God	She knows that Jesus is a Jewish man
Jesus does not fully reveal himself to him	Jesus teaches her clearly that he is the Messiah
He does not understand the living water	She asks Jesus for the living water
He leaves lacking understanding	She leaves knowing who Jesus is
He hides his belief	She tells her whole town about Jesus

The Samaritan woman is a model of prayer and worship for us today. So go “pop up prayer” and build worshipful connections, COVID-19 or not.

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