March 15th, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

3rd Sunday of Lent

10:30am

Water in the Wilderness

1. In the Wilderness

 There is no question in looking out to the pews that our community, locally, nationally, and globally is in a true time of wilderness. We are in a time when variables are changing quickly, we are dealing with factors unknown to us, and fear is ratcheting upwards as we face a pandemic.

 The lines at the grocery store are longer than our usual Snowmaggedon crisis, where folks are purchasing toilet paper and hand sanitizer in bulk. Will this wilderness be a week, a month, months, or more? We do not know, and in some ways, we see the worst of humanity. We see folks hoarding it all for their wilderness fears – to sustain their families, to self-preserve. And then again, just as Mr. Rogers says, we can find the helpers – the nurses and doctors who stand in the face of the epidemic and still continue to treat, those who will not leave the vulnerable and hungry without food or water, those who stand in the wilderness, but stand together.

 When we think about Lent, we think about wilderness. If this is not a time of wilderness – I’m not sure what is. Perhaps our best reference point for handling such a time as this is to look at the stories that are carried throughout Lent. As we stay indoors, maybe we take the time to look at Sabbath. As we see barren aisles in grocery stories, we ask ourselves how to best love and serve our neighbor. As we are called to love our neighbor and can no longer embrace them, how do we love our neighbor through words, through comfort, through prayer? The wilderness is indeed scary, it’s all over the news – but perhaps, if we put ourselves in a grace-filled mindset with our eyes upon Jesus’ wilderness experience, perhaps it will be an opportunity to learn how to love and live as a disciple in new ways.

1. Living Water

 It is not only toilet paper in the aisles that cannot be found, but bottled water is hard to find – again, a nation afraid hoarding the water so they may be sustained. Water is bound to who we are – it runs through our bodies, we need it to live, and we are born of water. When we are baptized, we use water as a symbol of cleansing and healing and renewal. As we take baths and showers, we also use this water to cleanse ourselves of the dirt and grime of the day. Ironically, as we look at Earth Day next month, we face the tough reality that water is a resource that is not unending. Water is essential to our lives, to our very living, in so many ways.

 As Jesus approaches the well and the Samaritan Woman, he is thirsty in the barren land. At first, she is surprised at their interaction – does he know who she is? Does she know who he is? They are certainly in two different parts of society that should not mix, but as always, even in the wilderness, Jesus crosses all the boundary lines of the caste system.

 He asks for living water from the woman, and her practical response is one that the well is deep, he has no bucket, and where would you get that living water? She’s already on the to the suspicion that he’s more than the average guy, when she asks if he is greater than the ancestors, greater than Jacob himself? Jesus tells her that this well water will leave people parched again, but he is offering a water that quenches an eternal thirst.

 In the wilderness, she must be wondering where this water can be found. When Jesus asks her to go and get her husband, she’s honest, straight-forward, and acknowledges that she has no husband. He says that he knows – that she’s had five husbands and the one she’s with right now isn’t her husband. And the woman in the well is stunned – you are a prophet, you know more than anyone does about me. How can this be? And Jesus tells her the truth, just as she told the truth – He is the Messiah, the one that has been long awaited.

 In awe, the Samaritan woman went back to her community and told all of her friends what had happened at the well. Without meeting Jesus themselves, they are moved by her testimony of what occurred and they chose to follow Jesus. They, without having witnessed the well moment, were able to believe and to celebrate the coming of the Savior of the World that had been so longed for throughout the ages.

1. Living Water vs. Water

In the wilderness we live in today, where water is not a sustainable reality or off the

shelves, what if we were to think more about the living water that sustains us beyond water. And yes, real water from the tap is important – but again and again, you will become parched, you will need more. Yet, this living water, this living truth, this is the water that will sustain and forever nourish.

 How do we find the living water? We find the living water when we remember our baptism – one baptism for an entire lifetime. We find the living water when we are able to practically build real wells for neighbors who cannot find water. We find the living water when we interact with one another, we nourish one another with words of encouragement, truth, and sustaining hope. We find the living water by living in the wilderness just as Jesus did – walking, journeying together, seeking those things that give us life in real and tangible ways as we walk towards the cross.

1. Easter is Coming

Perhaps one would say that the 3rd Sunday of Lent is too soon to acknowledge this, but

in the times we are living in, I’m making the pastoral call. I need you to hear, to know in your heart, and to sense clearly that while we are in the wilderness, Easter is coming. Nothing, absolutely nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God and the moment of the Easter resurrection. Love will win. Death will not have the victory. Fear will be cast down. Evil will be torn down by a love so fierce that breaks the boundaries of death. Wilderness may stay for a while, we may feel the real and difficult pangs of wilderness, but my friends, may you remember in these days and weeks to come, Easter is coming. Nothing can stop that kind of love.

 In the meantime, in this wilderness, the facts are changing by the hour. We aren’t able to share a hug, we are facing variables and unknowns, we are living out the true anxiety and fear of a wilderness journey. This may be our last Sunday in person for a while – we do not know yet. As difficult and as painful as that is, may we remember how to be the light of Christ in the world still. The wilderness does not win, nor does the darkness, and it is our call because we were first loved by God - to go and to love the world. We will discern in the next days and weeks how to show love to our neighbor in new and different ways and to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

 Praise be to God, for the wilderness we do not journey alone. In faithfulness, let us trust that God will guide us by God’s powerful Spirit in how to act in love. And may you know the hope that love breaks all walls and stymies fears. The wilderness may be here, but my friends, my beloved, Easter is coming.