**In a Time of Fear. In a Time of Isolation**

On Sunday, March 15th we at St. Helen’s began to experience a smaller number of people gathering for the Eucharist. At the time we did expect that this particular Sunday service might be the last one for the foreseeable future. We were all beginning a time of social distancing and isolation. These are the notes of my sermon for that third Sunday in the season of Lent. May it be a prayer, a reflection, and a word of hope to all of us as we think about, not only our community at St. Helen’s, but all the communities where we live and move and have our being.

When you find yourself thirsty, do you feel like complaining? I find the Old Testament lesson (Exodus 17:1-7 – the people complain that they are thirsty) and the Gospel (John 4:5-42 – the woman at the well) for today are particularly appropriate for this time in the life of the world and the situations in our communities, homes and workplaces. In these two stories of desperation and isolation, there is a message of hope. It is that message of Hope that I want to share with you today. It is one that we can take with us when we leave here today. It is a message each of us can share.

Think about where you are in your life at this moment in time. How wide are your circles of family, friends, co-workers and schoolmates? Have any of us made far ranging plans for the future? Do we know where we are headed? How much do we think about how we live our own day to day lives, wherein we take good food, clean water, shelter, work, income, health care, education, and recreation as normal; as a given? Do we think about what might happen to us when some occurrence brings dramatic change?

The people of Israel are making their way through the desert. They have been on a long journey so far and not sure of their final destination. They are trusting that it will be a place that God is leading them. Their trust is in the leadership of Moses, but he has had them camp at a place where there is no water. They are thirsty and complain against him. In fact, they are ready to rid themselves of him. They say it would have been better to stay in slavery in Egypt than be brought to such a desolate place to simply die of thirst. Moses had led them ‘en masse’ out of Egypt to go to a promised land. Although they were enslaved and life was getting more difficult, until Moses came along the people had been living ordinary lives. They went about their daily business. There were always things happening in their wider community, but their own circles of family and friends was the framework for their day to day living. Does that sound familiar to you? We are aware of things happening in our community of course, but most of our own day to day living revolves around our family, friends, and our workplaces. I hear people complaining against the government that they coulddo more; they haven’t done enough. We are thirsty for answers and there are no ready answers. How did we get here? Life was so much better before. What will happen now? We are rightly worried for our loved ones, ourselves and our communities. We are all primed for a miracle at this very moment. And so, we pray. We look beyond ourselves. We look within ourselves. We look for someone to do something and we look to find a place of peace within. We are looking to our political leaders and our health care leaders and they are all doing the very best that they can. Moses took some of the elders with him and used the tool he learned to use, his staff. He struck the rock at Horeb and we are told that water came out.

In our day, we have wonderful tools of medicine and technology. We have great minds who are working at so many levels of the medical sciences, in technology, and in our societal structures. They are the leaders and elders using the tools they have learned to use to bring about a resolution to the circumstances in which the world finds itself right now. I hope each of us can find ways to give them our support in this work. Any complaints we might have may come out of our fears, out of our loss of control of the situation, and our lack of knowledge of how to make things better.

This is a time to look inward then, and let the Lord speak to our souls as he did with the woman at the well. It is a time to have a conversation about our sense of isolation. We should remember that this woman was in isolation from the rest of the community. This was not self-isolation. Her life was such that the isolation was imposed. Others feared that her way of life would infect the rest of the community. She had to go for water at a different time than the other women. She would have spent much of her time alone. She lived on the edge of the community. But the love of God in Jesus comes to her, speaks to her, engages her about who she is. She is told of living water that would well up inside of her. Jesus tells her, he is talking about something greater than simply water to maintain physical life. It is living water that brings fullness of life, gushing to eternal life. She is astounded. She goes and tells people all that has happened. Others in the community come to hear about this living water. There is a deep sense that in the presence of God, there is restoration, there is cleansing, there is unity and peace. The woman was restored to the community in that moment.

Because of the coronavirus, there are people who, like the woman at the well, are isolated right now. For some it is self-isolation. For others it is imposed. Our communities are fearful of being infected because there could be terrible consequences of getting too close. But we have wonderful tools to be able to include people and ensure they know they are not cast aside. They are a part of us and we of them. We have phones, email, skype, messenger, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and a host of other platforms to stay in contact and to share ourselves. We can let people know they are still included in the life of the whole community. God’s love draws us into the deepest of relationships with God’s very self. Jesus shared himself and the good news of God’s love with all these Samaritan outsiders. Walls came down. Isolation was abolished. All of us know that using love, expressing love, sharing love, and lavishing love brings healing and draws people together. I invite you to go within yourself, listen to what the Lord is speaking to your soul and then run to other members of the community, whether it be in person or ‘virtually’ and use your experience of that love and living water to let others know that we are all really one community. Reach out. Express your support to our leaders and elders who are working to overcome our fears and isolation. Share love. Share hope.