

March 12, 2023  
The Third Sunday in Lent  
Year A  
John 4:5-42  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA  
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

### Thirsty

Like many of you, I have spent a lot of time this Lent cutting fabric. We have two fabric using projects going on here at Emmanuel this season; our annual quilting project for Lutheran World Relief, where we are well on our way to having our yearly 100 quilts made and our Easter Vigil banner project, where people have been cutting fabric and shaping them into 12x6 rectangles that will be used for a huge art installation that will be revealed at the Easter Vigil.

While I do my cutting and pinning for the banner, I usually have the TV on. I'm usually streaming something that does not require a whole lot of attention on my part, something I can easily keep track of while I work. I don't so much watch TV as listen to it and I only look up if it sounds like something I really need to see and not just imagine. The shows that I've been listening too lately have been on the streaming service, Peacock, which, I've learned, unlike some other streaming services, is not commercial free. Instead, Peacock tends to play the same commercials at every break, which means that by the end of a couple of hours of listening I have the commercials memorized. Which is why I know the Progressive insurance commercial with the guy in the elevator practically by heart.

In the commercial there's a recent homebuyer who, according to the ad, is becoming his parents and there's the guy with him, who, a quick internet search about the ad campaign told me is called, "Dr. Rick". He's an interventionist, who has been called in to stop this hapless homeowner from becoming his parents. He tells us that elevator interactions can be hard for young homeowner who is becoming his parents. And then the action ensues.

The homebuyer desperately tries to interact with the people in the elevator, making increasingly, what my kids would call, “cringey” comments to the people in the elevator. He interacts with one about her t-shirt from Paris, with another about the view from her tenth-floor office, and with the whole group asking if there are any out of towners in the elevator. At one point the homebuyer is turned what is clearly the wrong way in the elevator facing the other passengers who are desperately trying not to make eye contact with him. He is told by Dr. Rick to turn around. At the end of the elevator ride the home owner tells the other passengers to keep in touch as they leave the elevator. He tries to leave the elevator too, but Dr. Rick holds him back, telling him, “That was terrible. We’re going to have to try that again.” He has failed the test of not becoming his parents.

I have to say that I remember this commercial, not because I particularly like it, but because it kind of breaks my heart. The home owner in the commercial is so desperate for someone to relate to him, for someone to interact with him. He is so clearly yearning for community even just with fellow passengers in an elevator that it’s almost painful to watch. I’m honestly not sure what the commercial has to do with homebuying or with becoming one’s parents, because yearning for community is not unique to the demographic of recent homebuyers or their parents.

Last night the Friday Night Live youth, with a one night only rebranding as the Saturday Night Live youth, attended a musical that Kayleigh Afonso, one of the youth in our church was in at North Attleboro High School. The musical was the high school version of Mean Girls. It was an excellent performance, with lots of talented and enthusiastic kids in the cast and crew, and they did a great job with the show.

Mean Girls is a musical about high school. It’s about fitting in and about cliques and, of course, about, mean girls; in particular one girl who is described in the show as an apex predator. It’s about finding your place and, ultimately, about

celebrating everyone's uniqueness. At its heart, though, it's about community. It's about desiring community and about seeking community.

Early on in the show, one of the main characters, who is about to move to a new country and a new school, sings about what she feels like she's missing in her life, and what she's hoping to find in her new school. She sings:

*Did you ever get a feeling  
Everybody else is happy  
Everybody else has friends  
And they're better friends than yours*

*It's a very recent feeling  
But it's running through my body  
And it roars  
It roars (Mean Girls the Musical *It Roars*)*

Later in the song she sings:

*Did you ever get a feeling?  
Everybody wants connection  
Yes, I know they have their friends  
But what is one friend more? (Mean Girls the Musical *It Roars*)*

As you might imagine the character in the show finds some bumps in the road along her way to making the connections and finding the friends that she seeks in the completely unfamiliar, to her, high school environment. But her desire for connection and community is palpable and almost painful in its intensity.

It seems that everywhere I look there's someone looking for connection, on TV commercials for insurance, telling us that young homebuyers and, apparently, their parents, yearn for community, high school musicals and musicals about high school, that remind us how deep the yearning is to make relationships and have friends, and then, of course, our gospel reading for today.

Speaking of painful, speaking of yearning, there's this Samaritan woman in our gospel story for today and she goes to the well at noon.

It's always easy to see the people who are in a story. In our gospel reading for today, we see Jesus, of course, and the Samaritan woman. We even see the disciples. They are absent at the beginning of the story, but their absence is commented on, so we're reminded to think about them.

It's harder to see the people who aren't in a story. For example, have you ever given any thought about why the Samaritan woman goes to the well alone? Why there's no one else there, besides, on this one day, Jesus?

The Samaritan woman goes to the well alone, at noon, which is a terrible time to fetch water. By noon it's hot. The sun is high in the sky. The walk to the well and then home again with heavy buckets would be even harder in the heat of the noonday sun. Also, by noon, the work of the day should have already begun. How can you clean house or wash clothes or wash the breakfast dishes without water? It's hot and late to go get your water at noon. Also, it's lonely.

The Samaritan woman went to get her water from Jacob's well long after the other women in the city of Sychar would have gone to get their water. It's likely that earlier in the day, before the sun climbed high into the sky, the other women from the city had gone to the well, had met up there, had spent a little time with each other there, building a time for connection into daily chore; asking each other about their kids, their husbands, themselves, and their plans for the day; sharing stories, questions, support, maybe even a laugh. When the women gathered to get their morning water, they drank from the well, not just of water, but of community.

But the Samaritan woman was excluded from that. There was a reason that she went to the well at noon. Her actions tell us that she was not wanted, that she was not a part of the community of women who went to well in the community, and not invited to become a part of it.

And yet, our story makes clear that her exclusion was not voluntary. She wanted connection. She wanted to community. If she hadn't, she would have just given Jesus some water when he asked for it, or maybe pretended that she didn't hear him, so that she could keep walking, go on about her day's tasks, in silence. But when she had a chance to talk to someone, a chance to connect with someone, she took it.

Jesus asked her for a drink and, instead of just silently giving him some of the water that she had just drawn from the well, she talked back to him, asking, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (John 4:9)

In this story, Jesus was thirsty. But in this story, the Samaritan woman was thirsty too. She was thirsty for the breaking down of the dividing walls that placed her on the outside looking in. These are the walls that she was up against:

- Men and women who are strangers don't talk.
- Jews and Samaritans don't interact.
- Women like the Samaritan woman in our story for today don't go to the well to draw water with the other women, then nice women, the respectable women.

Our gospel story for today is full of communities that were created by determining who's out, rather than by who's in. They were created by decisions that were made over the course of generations about who to exclude, rather than who to include.

“Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.” (John 4:9)

That simple sentence, a parenthetical statement in the written text of our gospel reading, explains the disciples’ astonishment when they come to the well from their food buying journey and find Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman. One of the social conventions had been broken. Jesus might as well have been facing the wrong way in an elevator. What was he doing, what was he thinking? Where was Dr. Rick, to take him by the shoulder and turn him around, telling him that that’s just not the way that things are done.

Apparently, Jesus’ disciples had enough sense not to try to correct Jesus, not to try to get him to act like a normal, rule following person. They were astonished, but the text says that none of them said to the Samaritan woman, “What do you want?” or to Jesus, “Why are you speaking with her?” (John 4:27) I guess they knew by then that Jesus would do things that they didn’t expect.

Of course, the disciples came in at the end of the conversation. Jesus had spent a long time talking to the Samaritan woman, about the shared ancestors between Jews and Samaritans, about the activity of God in the world through Jesus, about what true worship was, about who Jesus was, and about who the Samaritan woman truly was. It was deep, theological stuff, not the usual social niceties that might have been expected, if the social conventions had allowed Jesus and the woman to speak at all.

I’m not sure if Jesus ever got his drink, but I know this: Jesus gave the woman what she was thirsty for. He talked to her, and gave her the connection that she was yearning for. And more than that, he restored her to her community.

After her conversation with Jesus at the well, the woman abandoned her water fetching task, leaving her water jar behind her, and went into her city, where the women didn’t speak to her lived, and starting telling anyone who would listen,

“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” (John 4:29)

The people who she talked to went with her, following her back to the well, where they met Jesus and, upon meeting him, invited him to their city to stay with them. And the woman believed, and many others believed, that, in Jesus, they had met the Savior of the world.

And Jesus saved them, right then and there, by creating a community, where the outcast woman, where Jews and Samaritans, where men and women, were connected, were included, were welcomed; no matter who they were, no matter their past, no matter their present. They were connected by the living water who is Jesus, for life and for eternal life.

And in a world today, where parents and children, high school students and home buyers, and everyone else in between; where you, where I yearn for community and connection, we find Jesus waiting for us at the well. Jesus meets us where we are, to welcome us and to reunite us with God and with each other. Jesus gives to us who are thirsty, connection and community; living water, bubbling up in us, for today and for eternal life. Amen.