

LENT 3

YEAR A

EXODUS 17:1-7

ROMANS 5:1-11

JOHN 4:4-42

MARCH 18, 19, 2017

I had a dream the other night. In the dream I was given the task of welcoming God back from vacation. I was to welcome God back after God had been gone for a couple of weeks. As the dream went on, I wondered how could I make God feel special? What can I do in order to help God know that God belongs here and that God knows that I want God here? I thought of Bible verses to use and I thought about coffee and dessert and many other things but then wondered if that would do it for God. Would God feel welcome in my life because I provide coffee and dessert? Of course, God does not take vacations from us or from the world but how would you welcome God back if God had been gone for a while?

As I read the verses for this week and study I see that God is always present even when we do not recognize God. God does not take a vacation from us but provides for us on our journeys through life. When we wander from God, God seeks to have us come back. God even throws a “welcome back party” for us. In our reading from Exodus, the Israelites had just left Egypt and were in the wilderness. They were thirsty with no sign of water. God provided water for them from an unlikely source. In Romans 5 we read that God is also a God of reconciliation. God draws us back through mercy and grace. God does not wander from us but after we have wandered it is important for us to welcome God back into our lives. It is important to return to the Lord because we know God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love and forgives us our sins.

John 4:7-9 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew,

ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

The Samaritan woman was not looking for Jesus as she went for water. She was not looking to find the man of her dreams as she made her way to Jacob’s well in the heat of the day. She was probably hoping to carry out her daily chores and then return back to where she came from. The woman is like many of us before we meet the Lord Jesus for the first time. She was like us in that she did not look for anything special as she went about her daily routine. The woman at the well knew about her ancestor Jacob and that this was a special place. She knew that on this mountain by this well an altar was built. She also believed this was where worship was to take place. Yet, on this mountain by this well the woman met Jesus face-to-face and her life was changed.

Most of us were nurtured in our relationship with God through the efforts of our parents and faithful Sunday School teachers. Our Sunday School teachers taught from the Bible and gave us a basic understanding of the story of salvation beginning with the Old Testament and continuing to teach about the birth of Jesus. Our parents and our teachers taught us the stories of faithful people in the Bible. We learned about faith and about nurturing our lives by attending church and by studying the Bible.

Many of us fell away at one time or another. We fell away from the Lord and went our own ways. You and I wandered but then discovered that Jesus is Lord, God is Father and the Holy Spirit energizes our faith. We that were wandering sought a fresh relationship with God. We might search for ways to bring God back into our lives thinking that God was on vacation from us but it was actually we that moved. As we search for ways to welcome God back into our lives we discover that God does not require

us to do fancy things. God does not require coffee or dessert but God does want us to return to our relationship with God.

John 4:19-21 The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

The argument with Jesus and the Samaritan woman also touched on the proper place for worship. Is it on this mountain by Jacob’s well? After all, this is where Jacob thought he would be closest to God. The Jews believed that Jerusalem was the proper place. The Temple was so special that every Jew hoped to make it to Jerusalem at least once in a lifetime. Where is the true place of worship?

Where does true worship really take place? Where do you feel closest to God? We gather in this space every Saturday evening and Sunday morning. We come here because we believe this is our house of worship. We gather each week in order to draw closer to God. There are some that say that Saturday evening worship services are not the true time for coming to church. They would say that Sunday is the appropriate day. If you are not from our tradition of worship services you might think that this is ritual and not worship. You might say there is no room for the spirit to move because we are stuck in our liturgical settings. If you are from this tradition you might say that you don’t feel as though you were at church unless there is a Lutheran structure. You say you need the structure to keep you on track.

Where is the right place to worship God? What is the right way to worship? Jesus says that God is not contained in a house or in a church. God is not bound by any certain style of worship. The proper way to worship God is in spirit and in truth. Worshipping God is to praise Jesus and to lift God’s

name. When we draw close to God in worship it is like we have met Jesus for the first time. It is welcoming God back into our lives as if we were welcoming God back from vacation. We remember that it was not God's vacation from us but our vacation from God.

John 4:26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

The woman met Jesus for the first time. It may be that she had heard of Jesus but not in a way that she would care to know him. The woman was merely going about her business but then met the Lord. She met Jesus and he knew everything about her. Jesus knew all about her but did not send her away. Jesus welcomed her. As Jesus talks with the woman she comes to understand that Jesus is the Messiah. She comes to know that he is the one to worship. He is to be worshipped anywhere and everywhere.

Jesus does the same for you and me. He knows us but still wants a relationship with us. Jesus knows all about us but still sends us out to serve God. You and I also worship Jesus in spirit and in truth. We welcome him back into our lives and we discover again that Jesus is Lord. Jesus draws near to us and invites us also to draw near to him. AMEN