

A Meditation for Mar 12/23, 'the 3rd Sunday of Lent' – pg. 1

By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church

Hello and welcome to this meditation! Today, we're going to revisit John's gospel and hear about God's living water and God's eternal food. Well, if we find, and taste, of them, we will never be thirsty, and never be hungry! Come, let us prepare to receive heaven's food now. Come, let's begin our journey by turning to God in prayer:

**Enduring Presence: you are our goal and our guide,
you go before and await our coming.
Pour your love into our spirits in this time;
refresh and renew us
that we may learn to bring others to your living waters. Amen.**

Today's Scripture reading: *from* John 4:5-42 'Jesus and the Woman of Samaria' (NRSV)

Jesus came to a city in Samaria called Sychar. Tired out by his journey, he sat by a water well while his disciples went into town to get food. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and to whom you were speaking, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" Jesus replied, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman answered, "I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he."

Just then his disciples came back from town. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one asked Jesus why. Meanwhile, the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" Meanwhile the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said, "I have food to eat that you do not know about ... My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting now!"

'Inside-Out and Upside-Down'

Remove, we pray, O God, the scales from our eyes, unblock that which is stopping our ears, and all so that we may see and hear your truth in this time, amen!

Our gospel reading this morning brings us a gift that is built of contrasts, for it's a gift of inside-out and upside-down! It's a gift, I believe, that is absolutely perfect for us today in our Lenten journeys but, as perfect as it may be, the question remains, are we ready, are we

A Meditation for Mar 12/23, ‘the 3rd Sunday of Lent’ – pg. 2

By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church

willing, to receive it? You see, while God’s grace may be free, it’s not cheap, and it always costs!

Jesus and his disciples have been travelling through the arid countryside that was Samaria and, when they come to the precious water well at a place called Sychar, Jesus rests while the disciples go into the village to buy some food. In the meantime, a woman comes to draw water at that well, a woman who thinks that Jesus won’t speak with her simply because she was a woman. You see, she’s thinking very much in the terms of her chauvinistic, misogynistic culture where a woman would never speak with an unknown man. She sees herself as inferior, unworthy. But Jesus sees her for what she is: a precious child of God who is dearly loved. And, although the well can only give her earthly water, Jesus offers God’s living water. That woman also thinks that Jesus won’t have anything to do with her because she’s a Samaritan. She thinks that Jesus, as a good Jew, will see her as a second-class citizen because that’s precisely how most people living in Israel proper, as opposed to Samaria, would have felt. But Jesus sees her as an equal, someone with whom he has a bond that is eternal, and he offers her God’s spiritual food, the food that lasts forever.

As Jesus knew so profoundly well, that’s just what relationship with God does. God’s nourishment, as opposed to material nourishment, takes all of our dusty, musty ways of understanding and re-imagines them so that we can be made new, so that we all can become as one. You see, this relationship creates new life for us, and that’s how, in John’s terms, we’re ‘born again.’ And that new life frees us from all our fears, although it does sometimes turn us inside-out as a result, because it asks us to think about things anew. Relationship with God also lifts us out of hopelessness, though it does sometimes turn us upside-down. And this relationship replaces all of the limits with which we struggle each day. Limits of understanding; limits of feeling; limits of imagination. Relationship with God replaces all those limits with the infinity of God’s purpose, even though it does sometimes turn us inside-out because it asks us to think about things anew. Relationship with God gives us new energies, energies even though it does sometimes turn us upside-down! On this third Sunday of our Lenten journey, couldn’t we all benefit from being turned a little inside-out and upside-down? If we’re hungry, then maybe we need to feed someone else. And if we’re thirsty then maybe we need to offer God’s living water to someone else.

In 2009, when I was ministering at Caledon East United Church, a young woman named Sarah was the guest-speaker at one of the regular meetings of the Caledon Ministerial. Oh, my word, does her life-story ever illustrate what I’ve been talking about! You see, although Sarah had a very stable childhood that seemed to be healthy and balanced, it turned out that her parents, both extremely busy professionals, simply couldn’t find ways to feed each other’s hunger and quench each other’s thirst. So, by the time Sarah was an adolescent, her once perfect, upscale home life had become scarred by loud, bitter arguments. Now then, in years past, divorce was frowned upon because marriage was seen as a sacrament, an act of God that could never be undone. Remember the words? “Those whom God has joined together, let no one cast asunder!” However, ancient phrases notwithstanding, psychology

A Meditation for Mar 12/23, ‘the 3rd Sunday of Lent’ – pg. 3

By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church

and reformed theology simply find that a sacramental view of divorce is unrealistic. We might well invite God to be part of our relationships. Indeed, should we not invite God to be part of all our relationships? But can we really expect a human relationship to necessarily become ‘an act of God’ simply as a result of human words, no matter how valued or ancient? As you know, people can change in ways that they never anticipate, and the circumstances of people’s lives can change in ways that those people simply can’t process. But when children are involved in a divorce, is it not critically important to handle them very, very carefully, with lots of counselling, lots of love, lots of affirmation? You see, those elements of care didn’t happen when Sarah’s parents got divorced, and Sarah started to blame herself for what had happened. She developed intense feelings of inadequacy out of her parent’s inadequate relationship. Sarah started to experience overwhelming feelings of rejection out of the way her parents had rejected each other. So, it was, that Sarah followed a boyfriend down a path that she knew to be wrong. Even though she knew that path was wrong, Sarah, racked with inadequacy and rejection, just couldn’t bear to break up with him.

Living in an abandoned warehouse in a very sketchy part of town, Sarah did whatever she could in order to survive. When she got thirsty, she’d drink alcohol, which only left her thirstier. And when she got hungry, she’d eat crystal meth, or crack cocaine, which only left her hungrier. It’s nothing short of a miracle that Sarah is still alive because so many others who have walked down this horrible path have never walked back again. Perhaps you know of some? But Sarah did walk back out of that life, thanks to the dedicated ‘miracle workers’ at an addiction centre, who were able to help Sarah face what she had repressed for so long. Those workers were able to help Sarah feed her appetites, and quench her thirsts, in ways that were healthy. And guess what? At the time when she spoke at the ministerial meeting, Sarah was volunteering her own time at that same addiction centre that had ‘saved’ her, working to help others to walk back from that terrible place where she had once walked! Oh, it sure wasn’t easy for Sarah. But, with God’s grace, and the financing of her once-absent father, who did come back into Sarah’s life [sometimes we men can get it right!], Sarah did it – she got her life back on track! But I ask you to recall what I said at the beginning of this sermon: God’s grace may be free, but it’s never cheap. No, God’s grace simply has to cost us something if it’s ever going to be real!

Well, as we continue to walk our Lenten paths this year, may we search diligently for God’s spiritual food. May we search diligently for God’s living water. May we look for ways, not to gorge ourselves upon those substances for our own sakes, but to feed those precious substances to others, because that’s only way we’ll really satisfy our own appetites and thirsts. And that’s the inside-out, upside-down truth of it!

Amen? Oh, yes; amen!

Come, let us turn back to God now in prayer; come, let us pray:

A Meditation for Mar 12/23, ‘the 3rd Sunday of Lent’ – pg. 4

By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church

Eternal God, help us now to lay down all our self-defences. Help us to bring your love into the very centre of who we are, and what we do. Help us to become your gift of new life as we serve your spiritual food and your living water!

God, turn us inside-out, and upside-down, as we walk our Lenten roads! Humble us. Enable us to see how, all too often, we fail to do that which is godly while you continue to spend yourself for the ungodly. If we were judged by our actions alone, O God, we realize that we would be lost. But you are (O, mercy of mercies!) our Redeemer and our Deliverer as well as our Judge. So, save us from ourselves that, in your love, we may find who you would really have us be.

We pray now for all who are facing difficulty this day and we pray, too, for all the places where there’s difficulty. From within our church family, O God, we pray for Dave Kelly, that all of his treatments for throat cancer may prove to be completely effective, and that he may live cancer-free. Strengthen him, together with Sharon, Dawn, and the family! So, too, we pray for Wayne Kett, that, together with Pat and his family, he may ever feel your presence with him as he struggles with the latest outbreak of his pulmonary fibrosis. We also hold Henk Kooiman in prayer that he may experience your healing touch and strength.

In the silence of the next moments, O God, receive the deep burdens that our spirits bear today: *moment of silence*. All that I have named with my words, all that lies yet too deep for words to touch, we bring to you, God, as we take those words that Jesus once taught us and pray together the following version of Christ’s Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, amen.

Loving God, may your heavenly food and your living water enter our lives this week – may we feed them to others, and find their nourishment! In the holy name of your eternal love, amen.