

Lent 3, Year A

- We are gathered, here at the well, like the Samaritan woman, saying, “Please, Lord, give us this living water, so that we may never thirst again.”
- We are living in interesting and anxious times.
- I’m quite sure you’ve heard plenty about the coronavirus by now, and I’m quite sure that you’ll continue to hear a good bit more as time goes on.
- It may even be that you’ve already heard more than you’d like to hear.
- If that’s the case, I’m sorry, but you’re about to hear just a little bit more about it
- Because while it may seem as though we’re insulated from the worst of it, with only five confirmed cases here in the entire state of Missouri, the truth is that we aren’t.
- Because it’s spreading rather rapidly, by all estimates, and we could see cases here very soon.
- I don’t say any of this to try to scare you or make you more anxious than you may already be.
- But it’s important that we be honest about what we’re facing.
- It’s important because we are being forced to make some difficult choices.
- If we could potentially be transmitting the novel coronavirus without knowing it, potentially for a week or more, then the only way to slow its spread is to practice social distancing – to limit our interactions and keep our distance to avoid exposure.
- That’s why you see such drastic reactions from some state governments. That’s why all major American professional and collegiate sports leagues have suspended operations for the foreseeable future.
- And that’s why churches are doing something similar.
- As of last night, half of domestic Dioceses of the Episcopal Church have explicitly suspended or asked their clergy and congregations to suspend in-person public worship for at least two weeks, and possibly more
- First Methodist just down the block decided to go ahead and suspend in-person worship beginning this Sunday, and I know many other churches here in Jefferson City are considering doing the same
- If we read the writing on the wall, the prospect of suspending in-person worship here at Grace seems more a matter of when than of if.
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- I’m sure this elicits quite a range of emotion in you, just as it does in me.

- You may be disappointed, saddened, worried, confused, angry, or annoyed, or maybe even all of the above.
- We don't want our lives to change, especially not in light of a virus that it seems has thus far spared mid-Missouri.
- And our Sacraments are important. Our community and the connections that we have are absolutely vital.
- But I want to suggest that part of being community means making sacrifices.
- Loving our neighbors as ourselves means not letting our desires, our wants, trump their welfare.
- If our gathering here together could spread the virus further, however unintentionally, and lead to the sickness or suffering of our neighbors, of our loved ones, then shouldn't we refuse to gather for the sake of the most vulnerable?
- If just by virtue of coming together we could cause or worsen the suffering of those who are at risk, then shouldn't we consider for a time refraining from coming together?
- I know suspending in-person worship may still sound like an overreaction
- God willing, maybe it is
- Because we will never know if we overreact or do too much to stop the spread of this virus
- But we will know all too well if we don't do enough
- I don't know about you, but I would much rather overreact on behalf of those at high risk
- But if we end up having to self-isolate here in Jeff City for any length of time; if we end up unable to gather for worship on Sundays as we're accustomed to doing, it raises serious questions for us as Christians:
- How can we continue to be a community even if we can't all gather together?
- How do we stay connected to those who have to isolate for the sake of their own safety?
- How can we support the needs of our community, those who are vulnerable both in this congregation and in the wider Jefferson City area?
- Are there ways you can help? Are there ways we can help each other?
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- I don't know exactly how quickly this will escalate.
- I don't know if we'll see each other here next week, or if we will have to develop some alternative ways of being community, of being the Body of Christ
- But for today, at least, we are gathered here, at the well
- Asking God to give us this water always

- And the answer that Jesus gives to the Samaritan woman is something that I've been thinking about quite a bit, over the past several days
- "Believe me," Jesus says, "the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."
- "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth"
- This building is not holier than God's holy mountain.
- This space is not more sacred than Jerusalem, that great city of God.
- No matter what happens, we will continue to worship God in spirit and truth
- Even if we end up having to make the difficult decision not to gather in person for a time, however long that ends up being.
- Even if we find ourselves in the wilderness, so to speak, during this season of Lent or sometime after, we will find out exactly what the Israelites find out in our reading from Exodus this morning.
- When God through Moses brings forth water from a rock, the Israelites are forced to realize that even in this place that seems desolate, even in this place that represents the absolute lowest point of their wandering in the desert, even there – God is with them
- No matter where they go or how far they feel cast out from their home, from where they ought to be, they come to find out **God is already there**
- Water, even living water, can come from the most unexpected of places
- No matter what the weeks and months to come may bring, we are none of us alone – God is with us always, and we can still be Christ to each other while keeping enough distance to avoid sharing our germs with each other
- And what we will find, if we are forced to stop gathering in person, forced to find new ways to be a community, is the same thing that Israel discovered again and again, the same thing the Samaritan woman found at the well: no matter how we gather, no matter what we do, and no matter where we go, God is already there.