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Athelstone Uniting Church #95

15 March 2020

Lent: Connecting with the Heart of God

Lent 2: Responding to emptiness

Text: *Exodus 17:1-7 and John 4:5-42*

I'd like to begin with some news from our presbytery.

Ann Brown and I attended the Presbytery meeting yesterday in Gawler

Together we spent time in worship, we shared stories about how different churches in our presbytery are living out God's call on them in their communities, we voted for a new leadership team and we decided on a name for our presbytery.

This name will go to the Synod Standing Committee to be endorsed at which point we can officially use it.

In the meanwhile we can announce what we would like our name to be!

the agreed name is the **Wimila Presbytery**.

Wimila is an Adnyamathanha (First Peoples of the Northern Flinders Ranges) word. We have permission of the Elders to use this word as our Presbytery name. It's use and the conversations that we will have to talk about its meaning are an important part of our covenantal relationship with the First Peoples.

Wimila, at it's simplest, means "business ground".

Wimila is a place where people gather to make decisions together. Each family (or in our case, each congregation) participates and ALL are included. Wimila ensures the gathering is community focused and has a collective leadership approach. Every one is included.

Rhane Tsakos is an Adnyamathanha woman and a member of our presbytery. Rhane was asked if there is a word that our presbytery could use from the Adnyamathanha language. Rhane contacted Charles Jackson, an Adnyamathanha elder.

Rhane said:

Note from Rhane:

When I phoned up Poppa Charlie and explained why I was calling, I had already decided that I wanted to ask him about the word WIMALA. First, we exchanged stories about what we've been up to and how we've been travelling since we last seen each other. I explained that I had been more involved with the governance and leadership of the Uniting Church in SA, and then went on to explain about the restructure of the church going back to multiple presbyteries, and how Presbytery A wanted to include a word from one of the Aboriginal language groups that fell within their geographical location. Before I could even mention the word WIMALA, Pop mentioned that a word had come to mind as I was explaining my reason for the call - WIMALA was what he said.

The Adnyamathanha people used WIMALA as a way to gather the people together to talk, to make decisions and to hear from everyone within the many family groups. It kept everyone safe, and included space for voices from the youngest to the oldest to be heard. If we want to work on building an even stronger covenant relationship between First and Second Peoples, then I

Wimila Presbytery. It's a great name and a significant gift of the Adnyamathanha people to allow us to use this word.

Let's turn to the Message

It is the third week of Lent – marked by this purple path to the cross.. a symbol of the journey we are going on as we prepare for Easter.

Today we heard Jesus say he can give living water.. so perhaps you can picture this 'path' being a river?

Let us pray:

As we continue on this Lenten journey God, help us to recognise what is at the heart of your Word. May that bring about change in us as we seek to grow as disciples, bringing hope to an anxious world. Amen

Are you thirsty? Are you empty?

The people of the Israelite community were literally parched!

As they wandered through the wilderness as God commanded, they became thirsty – as there was no water to drink. No water for any of them, including their children and livestock – their hope for the future – no water to drink.

They literally needed water – clean fresh water – to survive

After hearing their complaints, Moses turned to God for help. And God provided, in a most unexpected way, fresh water to come out of a rock for the people to drink.

God provided living waters for the Israelite people to drink. God did not abandon them in the desert.

Are you thirsty? Are you empty?

Jesus was thirsty, it was the middle of the day and he had stopped for a rest. He had nothing with which to draw the water up out of the well. Along came a woman, a Samaritan woman to fill her water jar. And Jesus asked *her* for water.

That question led to a deep conversation in a most unexpected place

Just by asking the question, Jesus was breaking all kinds of rules about who you should speak to, who should be seen with, and how you are to keep yourself ritually clean!

The Samaritan woman knew this and immediately queried how he could even ask this of her, considering their major cultural differences.

Jesus turns the conversation around – it is she who should be asking him for a drink! And not still well water, but fresh flowing living water!

The woman thinks Jesus is still talking literally about water and, showing that she knows the historical significance of this particular well, she struggles to understand how Jesus could possibly achieve this

But Jesus wasn't talking about physical water anymore, he was talking in spiritual terms.

‘whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. The water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life’

Fresh living water to quench her thirst, a water that would bubble up from within – welling up – to eternal life – life for her and as it flowed out of her ... living water for others too

The conversation shifts... Jesus reveals that he knows all about the woman's past and present reality – the reason why she would be choosing to fill her water jar in the middle of the day – when no one else would be around

This time the woman changes the conversation – deflecting perhaps away from herself? – and points out one of the differences between the Samaritans and the Jews that were causing them to avoid each other – their differences in worship practices -which mountain was holy – and again Jesus draws her back to the spiritual – it's not about which mountain – its about

worshiping in spirit and in truth – its about the spiritual connections – not the physical location.

Again the woman knew of the ancient hope: Messiah is coming – when he comes he'll explain everything to us – he'll make sense of this all!

Then Jesus spelled it out for her:

I, the one who is speaking to you, I am he.

What must have happened in that moment for the woman? To have the inspiration and courage to go in to the town and say to the people, Come and See!? Not only did they listen to her, but they went to see!

This led to many believing in Jesus because of the story she shared.

The way Jesus had seen who she really is and yet had offered her this living water.. had been transformational for her.

It's interesting that when the woman left to tell the people about Jesus, she left her one connection to the physical water behind – that water jar.

Are you thirsty? Are you empty?

I read that in Japan, in the weeks after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, the troubles at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant continued, and 150 miles away in Tokyo, mothers were being warned not to mix their babies' formula with tap water. Even though authorities warned residents not to hoard, it still happened. They rushed to buy up bottled water – and understandably so. If the tap water wasn't safe for the babies, why risk it for anyone else?

The people of Japan had to think about what really mattered and what they really needed to survive and how to care for the people they loved most.

Does that sound familiar? In the current situation that we find ourselves in, with the corona virus, people have been hoarding – all kinds of things!

People have been thinking about what they will need to survive and how to care for their loved ones (perhaps not always in sensible ways!)

Its in these moments that we are drawn to think more about our needs, and more about the needs of our loved ones

Our lives are disrupted and we are confronted with not just our physical and emotional needs but our spiritual ones too.

Are you thirsty? Are you empty?

Are you feeling anxious or afraid because of this pandemic or because of the way others are behaving as a response to it? Are you having to make difficult costly decisions? Are you having to make changes because of the unknown impact of the spread of the virus?

When our lives are a struggle, God's grace comes to us like a stream of living water.

God's grace comes to us through the gentle whispers of hope

God's grace comes to us through people doing amazing things.

Perhaps you have heard the story about many of the Italians – needing to stay home because of the virus breakout in their country, they are encouraging each other by singing and playing musical instruments on their balconies – with others joining in on balconies in buildings opposite or around the corner. music is breaking out across the towns and villages.

Or perhaps you have heard of facebook groups being formed to offer help to people who are in isolation in communities around Australia. There is a new group called *Love your neighbour Adelaide: COVID-19 inspired local connections*.

They say "While some are jostling for the loo rolls others are rolling up their sleeves and embodying the Aussie spirit of compassion and generosity. Love your neighbour by doing something kind and reaching out in simple practical ways. Transform your fear in the process." #viralkindness

Jesus offers us living water – God does not abandon us. This is grace

As the days and weeks roll out ahead of us, may that living water within you, bubble up and overflow into grace for others. How can you reach out and show kindness? When does someone need a listening ear and a calm voice? How can you speak words of hope in times of anxiety?

We have moved to a stage when many things are being and will be cancelled for the safety and wellbeing of others. Sports events, cruises, travel, meetings, conferences, and possibly future worship services – if that is the safe thing to do..

However, as David Hass has beautifully written:

Love has not been cancelled.
Mercy has not been cancelled.
Prayer has not been cancelled.
Attentiveness has not been cancelled.
Goodness has not been cancelled.
Thanksgiving has not been cancelled.
Loving relationships have not been cancelled.
Kindness has not been cancelled.
Music has not been cancelled.
Conversations have not been cancelled.
Learning has not been cancelled.
Poetry and storytelling has not been cancelled.
Courage has not been cancelled.
Meditation and contemplation have not been cancelled.
Families have not been cancelled.
Faith has not been cancelled.
Hope has not been cancelled.
And ... God's presence with us, has not been cancelled. Amen

[Living Waters](#)

Are you thirsty? Are you empty?

There's a river that flows, with mercy and love

Rest beside these living waters

These words come from a beautiful song called Living Waters. Listen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVEsJXKfhEo>