

Lent 3a -- March 15, 2020 – Augustana – mjfn

Exodus 17:1-7 Psalm 95

Romans 5:1-11

John 5:1-11

## THE SAME ONLY DIFFERENT

The Spiritual Growth group is reading a book by Rachel Held Evans "*Inspired.*" In the book she looked at origin stories ... "how the world was created" stories. Many of the ancient stories of creation have some similarities with the creation stories in our Bible. But there are some significant differences that speak volumes to what we believe ... about who God is ... about the people of God.

When God created our world there wasn't a blood thirsty epic battle where the strongest god conquered all and survived ... there wasn't a special place where our God lived ... our God was not a God who was tied to the heights, or to sacred caves, or the deep water. Our God created the world in peace ... and it was good. Our God is not tied to a place or a time or even a building – not even our building. And it was all good. It was very good.

The Psalm we sang today reflects that – our God is so much greater than a blood thirsty God of water, hills, or caverns

O come, let us sing to the LORD;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
For the LORD is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.  
In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.  
The sea is his, for he made it,  
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

O come, let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!  
For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand. Ps. 95

Our God came down into this world ... not as warrior, but as one willing to walk in the garden with humanity ... willing to walk with us and to give their own life for humanity. To stoop down into our very lives. And it is very good.

There might be some sameness to our creation stories, but the differences are outstanding ... the differences are grace.

We, as a people, are the same in many ways to the ancient people of God:

- Israelites fear – we need water to live – SAVE US
- Nicodemus (who we read about last week) came at night ... in fear at least for his reputation
- Our fears – this past week fear has driven people to do some very strange things ... like to buy a year's worth of toilet paper ... to hoard supplies in order to make a huge profit reselling them ...
- Etc. .... Name the fear

Our woman at the well ... where is her fear? I wonder if her life experience left little room for fear ... she seems quite fearless.

- She came to the well alone ... where a strange man was hanging about
- She engaged in conversation with him
- She spoke back to him
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Where are we in this continuum between *abject fear and fearlessness*? Somewhere between the fear of the Israelites and the lack of fear in the woman at the well

We are the same as those around us: we wonder what is going to happen ... there is fear of the unknown that comes with covid 19. There is no shame in that. We are the same as those around us.

Where does the difference come in? The difference comes in because of the God we believe in.

Our God created this world in peace ... for goodness. Our God came down into this world ... not as warrior, but as one willing to walk in the garden with

humanity ... willing to take on human form and walk with us ... willing to give their own life for humanity. To stoop down into our very lives. And it is very good.

These differences are outstanding ... these differences are grace.

We as followers of Jesus feel fear or concern or anxiety ... we are human. We have also been shown a different way. A life giving way.

suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5)

And that hope which does not disappoint us. It shows us a different way

- Instead of hoarding .... we can stockpile for the foodbank
- Those who are well looking out for those who are unwell
- Those who have no fear .... comforting those who live with anxiety

Many years ago as a fairly new hospital chaplain I was very distressed when a child in my care was dying. I felt I did not do enough ... or that I didn't do things good enough. I was very disappointed in myself. Actually, I was devastated. My supervisor, Father Gilbert, asked me "Who do you think you are? Jesus Christ? ..." Well, no. It was good for me to remember I was not God and perhaps it was best to let God be God and let myself be human. It is good for us to remember that it God who stoops down to do that ... Jesus did it already.

Take care of others .... and take care of yourself as well ... act like people who know they believe in a God who came into our world ... not as vengeful warrior, but as one willing to walk with us and to give their very life for humanity. And it is very good.

We are the same as everyone else, but we are also different because of our God.

Be the same, but different.

Prayer: O God, there are many hands besides ours to do your work in this world, but we ask you to use our hands to bring healing to our wounded world... There are many others in this world, besides ourselves, but we ask you to use us: our gifts and abilities to do your work in your world. This we ask in Jesus name.  
AMEN.