



**"BOUNDARIES"**

**SCRIPTURE: JOHN 4: 5-42**

**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**

**March 12, 2023, Lent Three**

The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

**MMS:** A reading from the Gospel of John

**MMS:** Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. Jesus' disciples had gone to the city to buy food. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her,

**Loidaly:** "Give me a drink."

**MMS:** Now Jews and Samaritans in that time did not talk to each other. The woman said to Jesus,

**Kathy:** "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

**Loidaly:** "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked, and he would have given you living water."

**Kathy:** "You have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

**Loidaly:** "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."

**Kathy:** "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

**Loidaly:** "Go, call your husband, and come back."

**Kathy:** "I have no husband."

**Loidaly:** "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

**Kathy:** "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

**Loidaly:** "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship. God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth."

**Kathy:** "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

**Loidaly:** "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

**MMS:** Just then Jesus' disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,

**Kathy:** "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

**MMS:**They left the city and were on their way to Jesus. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But Jesus said to them,

**Loidaly:** "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

**MMS:** So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to the disciples,

**Loidaly:** "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete God's 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. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

**MMS:** Many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. And the people of the city said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

---

(Meggie and Emma come up and begin their work on the window frame)

***Boundaries: A poem drawn from the well of Jacob***

A diary of boundedness tells stories  
of tending and mending,

lending and spending ourselves,  
extending our hearts, our bodies unbound  
Our souls, our spirits, finally found  
Undrowned by the wells of the past  
And set free for living water at last.

We drip tales of limitations and border crossings  
Our brains washed in lies like nations and belongings,  
states and property lines skew the stories we tell  
The ways we think our lives are only parallel  
to each other.

It's all well and fine, this boundary talk  
When oppression is the house we inhabit.  
But what are boundaries in freedom's walk?  
What binds us when we no longer bathe  
in the delusion of separation, in the haze  
of independence?

Can we share the revelry of uniqueness, of flourishing bones?  
Move to the music of our shouts, our songs, our moans?  
Can we dance around the well that will never run dry,  
The water that washes, that floats, that runs by  
the seat of our maker, the poetic creator  
Who dreamed up this elegant tragedy we call life?

The truth is boundaries are strange artifacts  
Fruit of futility, remnants of attacks,  
of the cruelty we can't seem to help but  
repeat, lather, rinse, and repeat.

Jesus at the well of the ancestors—meets a sibling weary from it all  
This family of things that has her trapped in serial marriages  
to brothers upon brothers to keep her legit.

The deaths, the transactions of her humanity never quit.  
She is no one without all the hims who lay claim  
All the he's that mark her with his name.  
That's the definition of her one wild life.  
You are no one without a man to claim you,  
No one, no matter what, no matter who  
There is no you without the him and the glue  
that binds and entwines, that ensnares and spares  
no one from its demands

Jesus meets her there, and asks for a drink  
I cringe with that demand. I think  
That's so arrogant, so crass.  
Get your own water Jesus!  
Get off your morass!

Can't you see she's exhausted?  
She's carrying the water for too many now  
Forget that Samaritan/Jewish row  
She is entrapped by the fathers, the brothers, the caste  
Systems that you, Jesus, say will never last.

So don't ask her to give you a drink. Give her a break,  
for God's sake! Can't we cut to the chase—let's get to the  
freedom part—to the living water you say that you are.  
The way this story gets told—it's old, old enough to know better  
We need something more than Paul's letters  
about sin and all the scrapes he's been in

So, back to the boundaries, maybe this is one  
we have decided to set  
no more energy spent on the rule of the fathers.  
No more time obsessed with the coffers,  
the scoffers, the ones who always want more

so the lesser becomes evil instead of the score  
being settled for once and for all.

The boundary shouldn't be about culture  
or gender, race, ability, or class  
Or who can keep going longer, who can outlast

Let's set boundaries on meanness, not on cleanness.  
Let's draw the line at violence, at the lies,  
at the stealing... let's get the stick across the sand  
in the place where the ones stand  
who have had more than enough of the stalling  
of the stone-walling  
about what needs to change  
about whose behavior is out of range  
of normal. That normal is killing us all.

So back to the well, to the woman who came to Jesus that day.  
She has so much to teach us about our own lost way.  
We are walking in circles that won't free us,  
that don't feed us or see us—or leave us with much choice

But to boundary ourselves against the unrelenting fray  
of the misguided disciples, the Christians of our day.  
We feel it, don't we? The scrutiny closing in  
The legislatures passing laws about our kin.  
About our siblings in drag, our friends in transition,  
about our children learning the truth of our history.  
The laws just keep passing, and passing, and passing  
And before we know it we are drowning in all the harassing,  
in a poisoned well  
the medicine of the water tables contaminated.  
And we're all left, thirsty, choking, dehydrated.

How can we live this way any longer?  
The earth herself can't cry out any louder.  
Let's get back to the well quickly  
And see if Jesus is still there—to tell again  
Who we are, how we've strayed, how the living water  
Can tell us everything we've ever done.

Boundaries can save us, they can murder us, too  
They can stave off the toxins, they can creep in as abuse.  
We can't seem to free ourselves from confusion  
from what is supportive and what is exclusion,  
about the difference between actual threats to our well being,  
and the opportunities to finally start the deep healing.

That's what the living water can clear up, can frame  
The difference between the lines that maim, that shame and blame  
and the lines that connect,  
the difference between the shared fabric  
and the unnecessary static  
that human greed has created.  
How do the margins protect our softness  
instead of kill us softly  
with the battle songs of mine, ours, and over my dead body.

The living water must mean  
no more dead bodies  
piled up in graves  
secret and full of those  
whose human dignity  
needs the boundary that God  
tried to set at the very beginning  
when God said it was good.

That was us, you know, back in the day

Back in that ancient creative display.  
We were what God called good—all of us  
All the birds and grasses and great waters.  
All of it was called good, the sons, the daughters  
the two-spirits, the tiny ones, the giants, the plants  
The four-leggeds, the millipedes, and the diligent ants.

The water we draw from Jacobs well is not where we go to remember  
It's back to the primordial waters, there we claim our shared splendor  
And the good news can spread from that great pool of creation  
Jesus was trying to tell us he was not to ever be claimed by one nation  
He never meant to be the colonizer, a killer of culture  
He was never here to be a capitalist, a divinely appointed vulture  
He does not feed on our suffering, he does not sanction oppression

Jesus is more like the ocean  
than a king  
Jesus is flowing, mighty, mysterious, and full of life  
Not violent, not opulent, not the author of strife.  
The reason he turned over the tables and talked of swords  
is that he understands what gets our attention.  
The one who made us is not immune from frustration,  
from sorrow,  
from wondering if this human experiment  
will even make it to tomorrow.

The woman at the well is us—she is you, she is me.  
She is the whole lot of us, the collective, the we  
The ones thirsty and tired, the ones marked,  
the ones barred  
from knowing our worth comes from God  
Not from the fathers,  
not from the banks,  
not from the ones who close ranks,



not from the ones with the biggest tanks.  
not from the law makers,  
not from the money changers,  
not from the keepers of countless dangers.

The Living Waters will clear the clogged pipes of our dreams.  
The world can be different,  
our boundaries can break open the seams  
that bind us to old ways that are getting us nowhere fast,  
that confuse truth with unrelenting bombast.

May something shake loose in the lines you have drawn  
May you finally grow tired of being a pawn  
May something open within you that the living water can fill  
Open wide for the flow of Divine love to be really, really real.

Boundaries are sometimes not what they name  
They don't protect as they claim.  
They keep us tired of propping them up,  
mistaken about what's actually got us trumped-up.

Boundaries should never separate one from another.  
They are ways of being connected that honor,  
that give us the best chance to pause and to ponder  
the fact that we are always, already together,  
tangled up with each other, with everything that is.  
The living water flows through us and imbues us  
with the truth about this web we have tried to bind.

It took a lot for the woman at the well to tell her people  
how clearly Jesus could see her entrapped in the evils  
they were living by.  
I wonder if they understood that she was calling them in  
to a new way to see her, not just to see him.

Scripture says many believed that day  
Many decided to see themselves and their sister  
and their God in a new way.  
With a vision of a world  
born in solidarity  
with balance, with right relationship,  
with sincerity.

Boundaries are not lines to separate  
because we are different  
they are guides for us to thrive as considerate  
of each one's unique way of being one of us.

Here ends the poem, the scripture, the word  
Here ends the anxiety when some lines  
we've treasured get blurred.  
Welcome the ways colors run when water flows freely  
Embrace the mystery of a God who really, really, really  
believes we can find our way across lines that divide us,  
and trace the threads that can make us collectively righteous.

In the name of the woman who carried all that water back in the day  
In the spirit of finally letting her have her say  
The whole world is our temple  
The very ground our cathedral  
The sky is our limit  
Zest's secret not cerebral  
We have it in us to embody truth that sets us free  
We are not bound, we are loved  
and that is true for you and for me.

Thanks be to God.