



**Third Sunday of Lent (A)**  
**John 4:10-26**  
**March 19, 2017**  
*The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector*

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

One of the groups which meets here at St. Mark's is called, 'Families Against Narcotics.' The group is relatively new to Grand Rapids, and I have already attended two of their meetings since I began my ministry here.

The first meeting was attended by over 125 people who came from across greater Grand Rapids, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, law enforcement officers, attorneys, court judges and Dr. Jeanne Kapenga who formed the organization here and who is guides it. Last week, the meeting was focused on individual family members who introduced themselves by first name only and talked about how the narcotics epidemic has impacted them and their families.

Some of the participants talked about a loved one who is dealing with the addiction or not dealing with it. A few talked about having the addiction themselves. Others talked about having lost a loved one. It was deeply moving and a powerful experience of what the epidemic is doing to families and society in our area and elsewhere.

Part of the mission of the organization which exists in many other places is to help remove the stigma of what the addiction is doing to those who desperately need help. Another part of the mission is to assist family members who are trying to help one another and also to cope with the stigma of the addiction.

FAN, Families Against Narcotics, is doing significant work in our community. I invite you to pick-up a brochure which is on the resource table near the Transept doors if you would like to know more about FAN. I invite us to pray for those individuals and families struggling with addictions of any kind.

The stigma of addictions can be paralyzing for individuals and families. Some of us will remember the stigma of the Aids Epidemic which took years for society to accept and embrace. "Accept and embrace": two powerful images which Jesus and the woman in today's Gospel took seriously when they met one another at Jacob's well.

Jesus was at the well and declared openly that he was thirsty. Did he say that to simply 'engage' the woman in conversation? Or, was Jesus genuinely in need of water? After all, she had a bucket from which to draw water from the well, and he did not?

We believe Jesus to be the water of life, the wellspring of life, and this passage is often cited as the 'Water of Life Discourse'. Here in this scenario which we read narratively because of his richness and complexity, Jesus is in need of water, and the Samaritan woman is in need of Jesus.

Jesus likely had been on the road as a Jew in foreign territory, Samaria, for some time. As some of us may know, Jews and Samaritans did not mix in society, and Jewish men and certainly rabbis would not have engaged a Samaritan woman in conversation.

It seems to me that the transforming power of this text is in the engagement of both Jesus and the woman at the well, an engagement that eventually meant that both benefitted from the encounter. Some scholars claim that it was this encounter, however it occurred, that opened the door to women as important disciples outside Jesus' circle of the women who supported him and the apostles.

The Samaritan woman played a very important role in the spreading of the Gospel in her question about Jesus as the Messiah. The question is really a statement of faith. Jesus had touched her deeply in the encounter at the well. She had touched Jesus as well. They each benefitted from the encounter and the conversation even though they came from very different worlds with very different world views and very different expectations of one another.

We do not have to go very far to experience very different worlds with different world views and different expectations of others. To drive down Division Avenue on any day of the week is to experience fellow human beings in great need.

To walk in to our own Parish Hall on Sunday mornings is to experience fellow human beings in need. Our Breakfast Café seeks to help meet that need, and we give thanks for all those who help make that ministry come to life week after week.

To come here on the first Tuesday of the month would be to experience fellow human beings greatly impacted by the narcotics epidemic, an epidemic which continues to claim more and more lives. To pay attention to national and world news is to experience the plight of those on our city streets as well as migrants, refugees, victims of trafficking or those suffering because of climate change. The needs of so many are growing at an alarming rate, a rate which will only increase in our country if government funding is less and less available.

Here we are in this beautiful and comfortable Sanctuary experiencing the Word of God proclaimed, preached and pondered. Here we will soon experience the extravagance of God's love in the Holy Eucharist. Here we are called to a deeper awareness of our own needs and the needs of those around us.

In my soon to be one month anniversary here at St. Mark's, tomorrow to be exact, I have already experienced the needs of many people, and I wish more of us had experienced the wonder of yesterday's Man Cave and the good experienced by so many. Here and in the city, I have already experienced the outpouring of generosity and love from people with truly compassionate hearts.

Grand Rapids is blessed by individuals and organizations such as our own Breakfast Café, Families Against Narcotics, Heartside Ministries, Access, Degage, God's Kitchen and the list goes on. The list goes on because there is a growing population in need of new life in our city, country and world.

But wait, Jesus is the promise of new life, life-giving water. Jesus quenches spiritual thirst in ways that we might have difficulty imagining. Jesus quenches thirst here at St. Mark's in our Eucharist and in the many ministries to which we are committed. Jesus quenched the spiritual thirst of the woman at the well and transformed her life in ways like she could hardly have imaged.

Here are some questions for us that we might consider:

How might we allow Jesus to quench the spiritual thirst we have and transform us and the world in which we live?

What are those things for which you thirst in your relationship with God?

What are those things in your life which need the healing power of Jesus, the love of God?

How might we hand over those things for which we thirst in our Lenten journey to the man from Galilee who ministered to all people without distinction?

How might we encounter the 'other' in our lives and be life-giving for them, because have an experience of new life through the power of God's love?

Big questions? Perhaps. Big answers? Just one: Jesus. Jesus is the love of God which is ours for the embracing. That love *is* ours and ours to share with others, love for which we are grateful and give hearty thanks. Amen.