

## God is my Salvation

(Isaiah 12:1-6, John 4:1-15)

It's the first Sunday in February, which means it's time for our annual meeting. After worship members will hear from leaders of our church as they review 2018. It was a good year and God-willing 2019 will be even better. Many of us say "*God-willing*" or "*the good Lord willing*" about any number of things, usually associated with future plans or outcomes; it's a way of saying... it's all up to God.

The prophet Isaiah would agree. Our relationship with God is clarified in four words: "God is my salvation." Though we try, the best of us still falls short. Every parent knows that in the eyes of a child you can be a hero the same day you're a failure. Life is full of challenges, but because God is our salvation we can find a way to be better; at least better than we'd be without God's direction.

Last week I had a conversation with a former member about her Mother, who is in the last stages of her life. Though we would rather not be reminded of our mortality the reality is none of us will live forever. The salvation we receive through Jesus gives us an eternal destination but this doesn't eliminate our earthly challenges. As we near life's end our bodies often no longer desire food or drink. The small water given in our final days is shared on a sponge.

Yet, water drawn from the "*wells of salvation*" is Isaiah's way of describing an endless supply of life. For the prophet there was more to faith than what limited the earthly body. The Hebrew people knew of a coming Messiah, they lived with longings of future fulfillment. Generation after generation taught of the Exodus from Egypt, the entrance into the Promised Land and the mighty deeds of King David and Solomon, certainly fallen in some areas but blessed in many others.

Christians are people of the cross. The inheritance we've received is more than future hope; Jesus Christ is our salvation. We should be accustomed to often explaining this to anyone we know. Mind you, not all of us are evangelists any more than all of us are preachers, teachers, singers, dancers, warriors or welders. God has given us unique gifts, but the same God calls us to use them to His glory.

The prophet calls for the people of Israel to find their strength in *singing* the songs of God's glorious deeds, the *many* ways in which God saved his chosen people. Chapter twelve of Isaiah acts as a kind of mini conclusion to the prophet's call. The first twelve chapters describe Judah and Jerusalem. The many sins of God's people are indicated in these chapters. The people have walked in darkness and wandered from the way of God's direction. God's people have a tendency to get lost.

Even though the Messiah has come, we still have a way of walking in the darkness, getting lost and wondering what happened. This is also the backstory for today's New Testament lesson. The sinful Samaritan woman made many poor choices before the day she discovers Jesus sitting beside the well. Samaritans were a racially mixed group, some were Jewish some were Gentile. Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles looked favorably upon these "mutts" of the Middle East.

It was after a secret nighttime meeting with Nicodemus that Jesus came into the region of Judea. From there, He went to the area of Galilee where He had another important meeting. While traveling, the disciples ask to stop and get something to eat. Jesus tells them to go on ahead and have their lunch, He has something else to do, a connection he feels compelled to make.

Jesus has a way of meeting people exactly where they are... and for the Samaritan woman it was at the well. How does their talk begin? She doesn't shyly ask Jesus for assistance; Jesus asks HER to, "give me a drink." Think about this for a minute: consider the gender roles of the time, the racial tension and even the time of day in which they met. This entire interaction was out of the ordinary, odd, and even dangerous. Yet, that's the unpredictable nature of God, it's all up to God!

Jewish men didn't speak with women in public, Jews didn't associate with Samaritans and no one planned to draw water at noon. The morning was the preferred time to go to the well. So when Jesus asked the woman for a drink she is surprised he even talks to her. Yet he knows she needs the water more than he, not just the *actual* water, but salvation that only comes from Him.

Jesus explains her thirst and she wonders how Jesus can offer water without having a bucket to dip into the well. Jesus knows that she's not entirely following his way of thinking but he continues, "*everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again* but-as our bulletin covers states- "*whoever drinks of the water I will give him will never be thirsty again.*" Jesus knows the woman is searching for refreshment but her needs exceed quenching a bodily thirst.

Sometimes our conversations with God are like this. We ask for a promotion at work and instead we're made aware of how much we have compared to others. We look for the love of our life in a social setting but discover only lost souls interested in a departure from reality. We long for improved happiness until we overhear a tragedy that keeps things in perspective; it's all up to God.

Jesus has a way of meeting us where we are but moving us from our selfish motives into transformed testimonials. Now, I don't know how your 2018 went, I'm sure that portions of last year were unforgettable. However, other aspects of 2018 may have included unwanted surprises or sadness, our church family experienced both. For me, two highlights of 2018 included an ending and a beginning.

When we hosted Beaver/Butler Presbytery, saying goodbye to Alan Adams as the Executive Presbyter, our church did a very good job as host; I miss him but Alan went out in style, right here in our church! Many of my colleagues still mention to me about how well we all did that day in July, it was a good day!

Then, when our church welcomed Caleb Hoal as the new Youth director, many prayers were answered. For those of you who were here last week to hear him preach you know how blessed we are to have him. Beginnings and endings often stand out to us, there's something more significant about these moments than the everyday, forgettable ones that just float by unnoticed.

In today's text there is also an ending and a beginning. A previous life of uncommitted living came to an end and in its place an evangelist was born. You see, after her encounter with Jesus the woman runs back to the village, calling: "come and see!" Come and see him-not a teacher, not a magician, not a smooth talker-but the Messiah. She tells her story: that Jesus knew her as she really was, and loved her anyway, that he gave her living water to drink. Her past may have been complicated but because of Him her future now looked so much better!

Some of the events of 2018 were less than desirable but we gather here today to worship our Lord. None of us are perfect, all of us need salvation, so as we turn to Him... I am confident that in 2019 good things are bound to happen!