

"Happily Ever After"

Text: John 4:5-30,39-42

Grace, mercy and peace be yours in knowing that the perfect life and innocent death of Jesus Christ has paid the full penalty for your sins, and that you even now – at this very moment – stand holy, faultless, blameless in his sight. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, do you know anyone at all that doesn't love a "happily ever after" story? The hero and heroine beat all the odds, overcome all obstacles and opposition, and, in the end, ride off into the sunset to live *happily ever after*. What's not to love? I'm not even sure exactly why that sort of thing makes us happy – given the fact that we all know it's just fake. Not only is the story usually just a figment of someone's imagination, nothing in this world lasts. How silly, when you think about it, to imagine that the couple that could never stop fighting before they got married, suddenly never fought again after they rode off into the sunset. Or that someone that survived almost certain death didn't eventually die.

In fact there is only one class of people who have any realistic expectation of living happily ever after - Christians. That means, by definition, that there has to be an event, a beginning or start, before anyone can ever have *happily ever after*. Every human being needs to be converted – brought to saving faith by God the Holy Spirit. There can be no "after" if there is no "now," and that "now" requires exposure to the Word of God.

Make-believe and reality do have one thing in common. That necessary "now" event usually involves confrontation, and our society abhors confrontation. At least the sort of confrontation necessary for true *happily ever after*. How ironic that the society that adores "happily ever after" refuses the means to get there.

Our national mindset seems to be slouching toward the silly notion that all pain and discomfort of every kind can and should be eliminated from life. Human beings should never have to do anything they don't want to do; nothing that they find arduous or unpleasant. If I find work too difficult, others should be made to supply both what I need *and* what I want. It takes too much work to bathe and dress myself, so why can't I just go to Wal-Mart unwashed and in my pajamas? Exercise is hard, so they need to just come up with a pill that will allow me to eat whatever I want, as much as I want, remain sedentary, and still be physically fit and healthy.

It was therefore inevitable that this silly, totally detached-from-reality mindset would eventually seep also into mankind's religious convictions.

Modern religion, to many, now means never having to say no to any natural impulse or desire. Nor should anyone else ever tell me that what I am doing is wrong. That sort of thing is hurtful, and therefore represents the worst sin imaginable in the new "Religion of No Discomfort." Condemnation hurts, and since we should never hurt anyone, we must never condemn. Even when God does.

This is the area we are going to examine in light of our text for this morning. That text is the Word of God found recorded in the Gospel of John, Chapter 4:

^{ESV} **John 4:5-30, 39-42** *So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ ¶ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." ¹⁶ ¶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation*

is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." ²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him. ³¹ ¶ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They 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 indeed the Savior of the world."

These are God's Words. In humble reverence we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Like it or not, screens have changed our world. It is an established fact that an alarming number of souls today are much more comfortable being isolated on their phones than they are interacting with real, live human beings. Since human beings will always be *influenced* by something, the inevitable conclusion is that screen-gazers are being influenced by whatever appears on their screens – a truly disturbing reality.

One thing they certainly learn is how to talk like the world, and to adopt the world's idea of group-think wisdom. For example, have you ever heard the expression *"Don't go there!"* Probably more times than you care to remember. Hollywood loves it, and whatever they love they use, and whatever they use, screen-gazers tend to adopt. It's used when someone refuses to talk about something that is uncomfortable, embarrassing, or in some way hurtful. The underlying thought of *"Don't go there!"* is not whether or not the thing they don't want to talk about is right or wrong. The point is simply that the person doesn't want to talk about it. They would rather pretend the problem doesn't exist, which they find much less stressful.

The problem, of course, is that there is nothing in God's Word that leads us to believe that Jesus bought into the notion of *"Don't go there."* In fact just the opposite is true - and it's not that he was ignorant of the concept. He just recognized it for the nonsense that it was and is. All his life he had to deal with virtually everyone telling him, *"Don't go there!"* The devil's final temptation in the wilderness was essentially a big *"Don't go there."* *"Suffering and dying to save the world? Don't go there. Worship me and I'll give it all to you without all that pain and misery."*

But Jesus always did *"go there,"* didn't he – even when it caused him abject misery (the full horror of which we could never fully comprehend.) The first *"don't go there"* was probably Satan's maniacal opposition to the incarnation – Jesus entry into our world at Christmas. The devil knew that mankind had one chance at happily ever after. Jesus had to come to earth to pay our sin debt. Mankind had to be *rescued*. Not enabled, not guided, not empowered. Rescued. For that to happen, Jesus had to leave the perfection of heaven, place himself under the demands of the law by being born a human being, live a perfect life, and then offer that life to pay what mankind could not. Satan's counsel: *"Don't go there."* Jesus went.

Yet another *"don't go there"* came from the mouths of *Jesus' own disciples*. They begged him not to go to Jerusalem. Pleaded with him not to offer his life in payment for their sins. Implored him not to walk the path to the cross and thus open heaven's door for mankind. And why not? Because that way was much too difficult, far too painful, way too unpleasant. Jesus went.

This morning our text demonstrates just how important it is that we do as Jesus did. It involves Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well – a woman who had had five husbands and was, when Jesus met her, living in sin with a man who was not her husband.

Can you imagine what our society today would have said to Jesus the moment he began to contemplate bringing up such a disagreeable subject? They would have shouted, in deafening unison, *"Don't go there!"* They would have pleaded, threatened, picketed, looted, Facebooked, Tweeted – anything and everything to shame him into not going there. They would have screamed at him, *"Don't judge!"* Jesus went there anyway, which ought to be highly instructive. He dove in, all in, head first. He began with a simple, **"Go call your husband."** And he followed up by simply dragging her

shameful sin into the light of day: **"You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."**

How could Jesus have made such a mistake? How could he have stumbled so clumsily into what was obviously a most disagreeable and uncomfortable confrontation? How could he have committed so great a social faux pas? Didn't he know how the game was played? Didn't he know that he was supposed to just pretend that nothing was happening, everything was fine, and to act and speak as if all was well? Jesus obviously knew all that the world expected of him in that situation. The fact that he brought up the problem anyway teaches us a vital lesson. He loved this woman – loved her so much that what he wanted for her was the genuine happily ever after. Because of that love, he wouldn't allow her to slide quietly into the fire of eternal torment. He knew full well that saving faith cannot coexist in a heart that has given itself over to sin. Her sin was a cancer that had to be excised if she was to survive. Unpleasant in the extreme, but absolutely necessary.

The woman's reaction is typical. She did what most of us sinners do when first confronted with our sins: she tried to change the subject, rationalize, or, better yet, attack her accuser. The woman, no doubt ashamed, seems to try a combination of all three: **"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."** What in the world does this have to do with the woman's five husbands and live-in boyfriend? Nothing at all. That's the point. The woman here rolls a rationalization, an accusation, and a change of the subject all into one big evasion. In effect she is telling Jesus that she would like to repent and change her ways, but she can't because the religious leaders (including Jesus himself) have her so confused about whether she needs to go to Jerusalem or to Samaria to repent. In her sin-enclaved mind she is actually blaming Jesus for her ongoing sin. Since he is a prophet, he is a spiritual leader and therefore a part of the problem that's keeping her from changing her ways. It's just not her fault.

Jesus proceeds to tear down all of the woman's defenses; to redirect all of her diversions. Finally, having had all of the many layers of deception and denial stripped away, the Master knows when the law has done its work, for the woman turns to the heart of the matter: **"I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."** Sometimes Jesus chose to speak in parables. Sometimes in riddles, such as: **"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."** Here Jesus recognizes not only that the woman has been crushed under the weight of her sin, but also that his time with her is short. As a

result he takes a rather rare direct approach with her and gives the woman one of the clearest and most direct statements we find in the Bible up to this point in Jesus' life as to his true identity: **"I who speak to you am He."**

Because Jesus went there, and only because he went there, the end of our text is truly a "happily ever after" ending. The seed (the law and gospel planted by Jesus) came to life in the Samaritan woman. She then became a missionary among her own people and through the testimony of this one woman, the first of what could well have been many generations was brought to faith and rescued. Truly this is one of the greatest studies found in the Bible on how to reach those who are dying; yet if you break it down into its basic components, what do you find? Simple law and gospel – the very same tools we have been given to carry out this same work today – and the courage to actually use those tools.

In the end, happily ever after is exactly what Christianity is all about, but "ever after" needs a "now." Sinful, rebellious mankind needs not just the gospel but also the law. In fact we need to reach out to those caught up in sin with the law precisely because the gospel has no meaning or relevance until the law has done its work. That's the "now" that makes possible the "happily ever after." Be part of that solution. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Exodus 17:1-7** All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

ESV **Romans 5:1-8** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶ ¶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

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The Third Sunday in Lent – March 15, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 158 (Red Hymnal)

"Glory Be to Jesus"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Exodus 17:1-7) Our physical needs often short circuit our understanding of our spiritual needs. This was demonstrated clearly in the events of our first lesson this morning, where the Israelites were willing to sacrifice their ethics and morality because of their thirst. Don't make the mistake of imagining that these words were written so that we could sit in judgment of those long dead. This lesson has been preserved for, and is to be applied to the lives of, the living. The very same temptation afflicts each one of us here today.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 51 (Page 31) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 5:1-8) "Peace with God" is one of the many gifts that Christians tend to take for granted – as is the access to God that is now ours by virtue of this peace. Jesus did that for us by removing that which had separated us from our God – our sins. What Jesus had to do to reconcile us to God was anything but easy. So too we should anticipate a life on earth that is filled with struggle and, at times, great hardship and sorrow. Yet even through that hardship our God blesses us.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 151 (Stanzas 1-3, 7) (Red Hymnal)

"Christ the Life of All the Living"

The Sermon – Text: John 4:5-30, 39-42 (Printed on the back page)

"Happily Ever After"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 159 (Red Hymnal)

"Go to Dark Gethsemane"

The Prayers of the Day

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 52 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty Father Bless the Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (27) Average (40) Wednesday (16)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
	-11:20 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship hour

CLC News – Teacher Neil Bernthal has returned the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia. Teacher Joshua Ohlmann has returned the call to Redeemer of Cheyenne. Pastor Matthew Hanel has returned the call to Living Savior of Eden Prairie. That congregation has now called Pastor Sam Rodebaugh. Mrs. Sara Ude has returned the call to Faith of Markesan School. Teacher Kirsten Gullerud, St. Stephen Lutheran School, Mountain View, CA, has asked for a peaceful release from her call as teacher and principal of St. Stephen Lutheran School. St. Stephen has now called Claire Abbas, Gethsemane of Spokane to be their teacher.

Midweek Lenten Services – Lent is a special and spiritually unique and valuable time. Prayerfully consider the benefits of our midweek Lenten services, and consider availing yourself and your family of those benefits.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour this morning.

Security Update – With the completion of the installation of panic hardware, the inner double entry doors will now be locked after the start of the service. The outer doors will no longer be locked. A silent doorbell has been installed which will notify an usher to come and open the door for late arrivals. This system was put into place not only to notify us of late arrivals (visitors who do not have the combination for the keypad) but allows the usher to see who is at the door before opening it.