

A crisis can bring out both the worst and the best in people.

Q. Can you think of any examples of worst behaviour in the current coronavirus crisis?

Q. What do you think motivates this?

Q. Can you think of any examples of best behaviour in the current coronavirus crisis?

Q. What do you think motivates this?

My message today is, *Jesus gives us the living water of God's abundant grace so we can be the best we can be.*

Jesus said: The water I will give will become a spring of lifegiving water bringing eternal life. (John 4:14)

Explore the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well...

There is mutual giving and receiving in the exchange...

Jesus and the Samaritan woman bring out the best in one another...

Jesus offers the woman the living water of God's abundant grace so she can be the best she can be...

¹ See Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John 1 – 10*, 91-3, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, THL Parker (trans.), DW Torrance & TF Torrance (eds.)

John Calvin

Each of us is like dry and barren earth; there is no moisture, no activity in us, until the Lord waters us with his Spirit. The Holy Spirit quickens, maintains and perfects life in us. He renews his grace within us. The Holy Spirit is a constantly flowing spring, a perennial fountain, that will not fail us.¹

Whereas water satisfies our physical thirst temporarily; the living water that Jesus promises, God's grace, sustains us spiritually. Later in the same Gospel, Jesus says:

'All who are thirsty, come to me and drink. Those who believe in me shall find streams of lifegiving water flowing from within them.' Jesus said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive.

(John 7:37-39)

Jesus seems to be saying that when we learn to trust in him, we will find hidden resources of grace welling up within us. Unlike physical resources, all of which are limited; the lifegiving water of God's grace is unlimited and superabundant. The more you put grace into action, the more there is to go around. For example, when you do something kind for someone, that person is likely to do something kind for someone else. When we are motivated by confidence and generosity, we put grace we have received from God into action, and this becomes a virtuous circle. By contrast, when motivated by fear and selfishness we instinctively want to grab what we can before it runs out. But by taking more than we need, there is less for others, and this becomes a vicious cycle.

Jesus's promise of lifegiving water is the promise of God's grace as an inexhaustible well within us. That is, by trusting in Jesus, by confessing him as our Saviour and Lord and Redeemer, we are promised a never-ending supply of confidence. But the confidence—note well—is not confidence *in oneself*; it is confidence *in God*. And this confidence in God is not vague or shapeless; it has a very specific content. On Friday I shared with many of you by email a bible verse that the Methodist Church has recommended:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)

Some of the worst behaviour that some of you cited earlier is, I think, at bottom, motivated by *fear*. On the one hand, we all have a natural instinct for self-preservation. That is what helps to keep us alive. Therefore, those who, for health reasons, are isolating themselves from others, are taking an understandable and sensible precaution to preserve life. However, a problem arises when self-preservation becomes *selfishness*. Typically, we become afraid that some supposedly essential item is in short supply, and therefore we stockpile much more of it than we need. And why? Because, subconsciously, this makes us feel less vulnerable and therefore less afraid.

But friends, the good news I share with you today is that *Jesus gives us the living water of God's abundant grace so we can be the best we can be*. That is, Jesus enables us to place our confidence in *God*. *God counters the spirit of fear* by giving us the *power* to do what is best. God our loving heavenly Father assures us that he *loves* us eternally. And God's grace can restore us to *soundness of mind*. When we are upheld by God's grace and supported by one another in the Church we can find the patience to deal with difficult situations and difficult people. We can find the stamina to keep going when we need to do so.

We can find the faith and hope and love we need not merely to survive but to live generously. We can share the good news that God's grace in Jesus is abundant and eternal. Upheld by that grace we can act in accordance with our best hopes rather than our worst fears. And much of this 'sharing' is by example. So, when others ask: "Why haven't you stockpiled toilet paper and pasta and rice?" You can reply, "I am trusting that God will see us through this crisis."

Jesus gives us the living water of God's abundant grace so we can be the best we can be. But being the 'best we can be' during an epidemic will not be easy. We are, perhaps, only seeing the beginning of what will become very testing health and social and economic conditions that may continue for many months. The strength of our faith, the cohesiveness of our fellowship, the lengths we are willing to go to help others; all these may be greatly tested. However, relying on God's grace, we can choose not to perpetuate vicious cycles of selfishness but instead create and continue virtuous circles of kindness.

Let us pray: