



## GRACE IN THE DESERT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

COVID-19

John 4:5

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

The setting for today's gospel is Jesus encounter with the Samaritan women. It is at the site of Jacob's well a holy pilgrimage site for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Sychar is now known as Nablus located in the northern portion of the West Bank and a great Greek Orthodox monastery rises over the well which you access through a series of steps leading down to the original well. It is possible for pilgrims to drink from the well as I did in 2010. A tremendous experience in knowing that Jesus had a drink from that same well.

Years ago, during the Second Intifada and in the midst of the conflict, the church was quarantined so to speak and the sole monk Abuna Ioustinos, a Greek Orthodox priest in Nablus, later spearheaded a huge reconstruction project. I was fortunate to have met him during my visit. Abuja recounted the story of living in the unfinished church during the time of confinement. He set about designing the new building, its interior and stained glass. As I recall, he also restored the frescoes that had been badly damaged.

I think about this today as I think about our own self imposed isolation of confinement and isolation. To have made the decision to suspend all activities and services in the church buildings was perhaps the most painful of my ministry. We need to be together, to support one another, to be nourished with the sacrament of bread and wine but we must take a time away. Our first priority is to do all in our power to protect ourselves and one another from this disease and to join in helping to stop its growth. Isolation seems to be the most effective way at this juncture.

So what will we do with this time? Can we, like the Samaritan woman and Jesus see things in a new light? Can we like Abuna Ioustinos find a way to make this time an opportunity for new creation?

Here are a few things that we can do:

We can commit ourselves to daily prayer. Join me in reading Morning Prayer Monday through Saturday at 7:30am. We may not be together but knowing that we are in our separate places praying at once we can claim community. Helena, our parish administrator, will send out the next Sunday's bulletin on Wednesday evening with the weekly blast.

The labyrinth is always open and we have the opportunity to join with others in walking each Saturday in Lent beginning at 8am.

We can reach out in love and concern (also curiosity) to one another by phone or mail. Check in and see how your friends are doing.

Please do not hesitate to call me with any needs or concerns you might have. I will be in the office Monday through Thursday from 9-12.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord

Fr. Shannon Leach