

Children’s Moment

Hello, girls and boys. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family. We love you and we appreciate you.

Here are a couple of pictures we received of seeds being planted and some sprouts coming up. Thank you! We love hearing from you.

Let’s check in with Esperanza to see how our seeds and seedlings are doing today. How are they, Esperanza?

Look at that! We have some new sprouts. And we see some of the seedlings are growing well. There are some that we still aren’t sure about. We’ll have to wait or plant more seeds if they don’t take hold.

Esperanza, some of the sprouts are growing too large for their place. What can we do? Oh, transplant them. Will you show us how to do that?

You are like these seedlings. You grow and get bigger. Then, one day, you’re ready for a change. You learned to talk. You learned to walk. You grew up and went to preschool. You kept growing until it was time to go to elementary school. Some of you are ready for middle school or high school. All sorts of changes happen. They are good. We don’t have to be afraid.

Do you know why? When we trust God and have Jesus with us, Jesus takes care of us, giving us exactly what we need to learn and grow. And, just like our seedlings, amazing things can happen.

Keep watching your plants and we’ll check in with you next week.

Will you pray with me?

You are invited to be part of Sunday School online. Visit us at www.coronaumc.com/childrensministry to sign up.

Message: “New Soil = Nourishment”

I invite you to do an experiment with me. Close your eyes and use your imagination. Pretend today is your birthday. Someone you love is going to make your favorite dish and serve it to you. Cost is no object. Time doesn't matter. It will be made just the way you like it. You'll be able to savor every bite. It'll fill you up in just the right way.

What is your favorite dish or meal? I invite those of you watching with your household to share. If you're participating on Facebook, tell us what your favorite dish is in the comments. We'll pause so you can do so.

Now, let's change the exercise a little bit. Let's make it a bit more focused. Think about your soul, the hidden, spiritual side we all have. Try to use your imagination and think about your soul's favorite food.

What does your soul desire? If you're like most of us, you may be stumped by the question. We have all sorts of desires. Some are practical, such as being free of COVID, health or an end to racism and prejudice. Some are more altruistic, like peace with justice. If you're really honest, we all have desires for stuff – a better car, nicer home, a better job (or a job at all), clothes or the latest tech.

Since this is a church service, I expect some of you said Jesus. Good for you. It's a good answer, but I invite you to be more detailed. Be specific.

What exactly does your soul desire from Jesus? Now *that's* a good question for each one of us to ask ourselves. I encourage you to take your time reflecting on what you believe. The answer is important. Your answer will change your life for the better for all eternity.

After all, there's some reason why we come to church, in spite of ...
... people who aren't like us
... music we may or may not like
... sermons that don't speak to us
... work we wouldn't normally volunteer to do
... a message we aren't comfortable sharing.

You get the idea. Saying we embrace “open hearts, open minds and open doors” means actually inviting, connecting and engaging in ministry with people we may or may not be like. That isn’t easy. But there’s good news: God is on our side. God is showing us a glimpse of what heaven will be like. It’s the commission Jesus gave us.

We’ve been talking about seeds, soil and planting. Probably the most famous passage in scripture about that is Matthew 13. This is the basis for our children’s messages during the series. A few years ago, a pastor friend asked a question that turned my view of this parable upside down. I’ll try to do justice to their teaching.

Jesus teaches us the sower is the same. The seed is the same. The sun and moisture are the same. It’s the soil is different. We are the soil! We get that. Many of us read this passage and see ourselves stuck in one of those situations. You may feel like the soil of the path, beaten down and trod on until we are hard and unyielding. Or you may feel like the rocky soil, with a desire to grow, but hindered by the hard places and shallowness of life. Or you may feel like thorny soil, with a growing spiritual life, struggling on a day-to-day basis to overcome worries and loneliness. We hold onto the hope that we can be like those who seem to soak up what Jesus gives and return that love easily.

Here's the shift: the soil doesn't have to stay the same. We can break up the soil of a path. We can sift out the rocks. We can pull out the weeds. We can all be fertile soil, ready and willing for a deeply rooted, healthy spiritual life. Jesus came to be with us to free us from our limits and conditions. He shows us we can produce spiritual fruit.

How do we (the soil) change? The best advice I can offer is to look at people in a recovery group. Anyone who has struggled with addiction or had a family member who has struggled will tell you the same thing. Real change can only happen when the person struggling wants to make a change. Until we decide and commit ourselves, we’re in denial. We’ll say or do anything to give the appearance of change, while we remain the same on the inside.

I believe all humans struggle with the same addiction.

It’s an addiction to sin. I know that’s old language, but it applies. We’re like addicts because we prefer to continue to follow our own, selfish interests, rather than following a path to life and health. We willingly and intentionally do wrong to others, expecting to be received and accepted back with open arms. Worst of all, we don’t see any need to change! That sounds like denial to me.

One of the reason recovery groups work well with churches is because of their approach. Anyone is welcome to come. All are encouraged to participate. To become a member of the group means admitting you have a problem. Trust and accountability are marks of these groups. If you fall off the wagon, you aren’t rejected. Instead, people help you to get back on your feet. In all of it, they acknowledge the need for a higher power who makes it all possible.

The soil changes. The hard spots are broken up, the weeds slowly and surely brought under control. Everyone can prepare themselves to receive the spiritual seed God sows. Once we freely and willingly accept it, the next step is to take in the nourishment we need. As you can see from our children’s exercise, seeds need daily nourishment.

What kind of nourishment do we need? Our souls are hungry and thirsty. Our will wants to align with God’s will. We want to know that we think and feel has meaning, that we’re loved and accepted. We want to know that our body can rest and healing is possible. All of these are available in Jesus. Nourishment comes when we spend time with God in prayer, reading scripture, caring for others and worshipping together.

Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well, our reading from John 4:4-15, is a great example of a soul being nourished and bearing fruit. There’s a lot to this story. It crosses all sorts of cultural boundaries for their time. The same is true today. For example, a modern retelling of the story may have Jesus sitting down with a transgender person of color at a nightclub. I don’t mean to offend anyone, but to point out that we can’t read this story from a position of comfort and security. Let me offer a little context for your own study and reflection.

The woman who came to well was surely lonely, insecure and looked down on by the community. Most households would gather water in the morning, yet here she was at noon. Her life hadn't been easy.

Jesus was tired and hungry. The group was on the road. He stayed at the well while the disciples went to look for food. They were in a place where Jewish travelers were not welcome.

It would not be proper for a rabbi to speak to an unaccompanied foreign woman, much less to ask her for water. Yet that's exactly what Jesus does. And, by her response, you can see she's surprised.

Jesus broke cultural norms in his time and he invites us to do so today. But there's a reason to do so. Jesus is inviting the woman to be transplanted, if she's willing. He's offering her life without fear, scarcity or loneliness.

The woman says, *“How come you're asking me for a drink?”* Jesus replies, *“If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water.”*

She thinks he's talking about well water. She's confused. He's sitting there with no bucket or means to get water from the well, which is deep. So Jesus sets things straight, *“Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst - not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.”*

And the woman says, *“Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty, won't ever have to come back to this well again!”* She wants to avoid the shame and pain she feels.

Jesus then asks about the woman and shows supernatural knowledge of her life. They have a conversation that reaches a high point in verses 23-26. Jesus says, *“It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people God is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before God in their worship. God is sheer being itself - Spirit. Those who worship God must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”*

The woman is honest. She says, *"I don't know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story."* *"I am he,"* said Jesus. *"You don't have to wait any longer or look any further."* Amen. Praise God!

A short time later, the ramifications of this amazing encounter bear fruit. The disciples are shocked and their minds opened to new possibilities. The people of the village come to see what's going on. They hear about Jesus from the woman. At first, they aren't sure what to believe, but hearing the story changes their minds. Jesus and the disciples end up staying three days in a community that would have been overlooked otherwise. The result: lives changed and saved. What an amazing story of grace. Everyone involved was made better.

Outside the walls of our churches and homes are people just like the woman who came to the well and her community. There are people who are ostracized and avoided because of who they are or what they represent. We can be like the disciples, unaware of our biases and selfish with our time.

We can forget everyone needs living water and the light of Son of God. We all need nourishment. Jesus offers living water to all who are willing to believe and accept God's kingdom. Jesus offers to quench the undying thirst of our soul. Just like an addict who knows they are ready, we can change our life for the better. The benefit is amazing: life fully lived now and the same life for all of eternity.

When we are transplanted, our life can change for the better. It all depends on how we respond. Mature plants are treated differently than seeds, but they both require care, water and sunlight. No matter how root bound you have been, how much pruning you've experienced, come to the well ... meet Jesus, listen to his voice and let your soul drink freely, willingly and deeply from his love.

**You don't have to wait any longer or look any further.
Welcome home.**

John 4:4-15 (CEB)

Jesus had to go through Samaria. He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me some water to drink.” His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food.

The Samaritan woman asked, “Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (Jews and Samaritans didn’t associate with each other.)

Jesus responded, “If you recognized God’s gift and who is saying to you, ‘Give me some water to drink,’ you would be asking him and he would give you living water.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, you don’t have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water? You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!”