



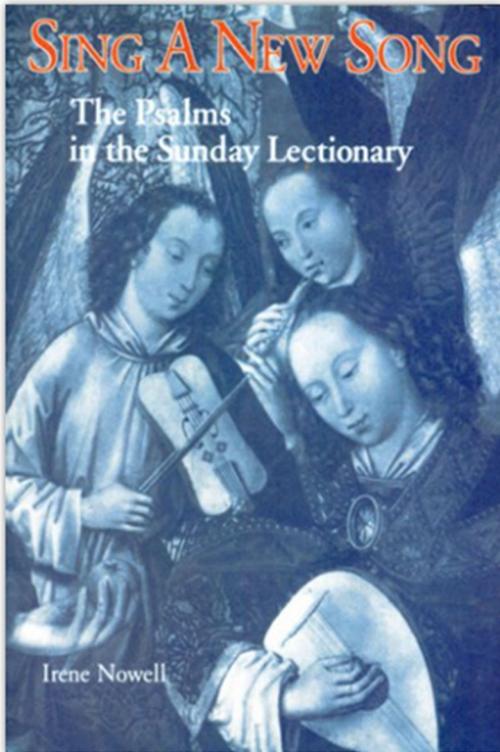
## BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

3rd Sunday of Lent/A  
March 8, 2026  
Sr. Susan Quaintance

Ex 17: 3-7  
Ps 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9  
Rom 5: 1-2, 5-8  
Jn 4: 5-42

If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

About a million years ago, in a class called Biblical Theology, Sr. Irene Nowell taught me that the psalm response can usually be used to unlock the entire Liturgy of the Word for any given Sunday. That's her claim, and what she sets about to show, in this book *Sing a New Song: The Psalms in the Sunday Lectionary*. Though I'm not going to do justice to all of Psalm 95, that familiar sung response, along with one idea from the *Collegeville Biblical Commentary*, shaped how I look at the readings from Exodus and John's gospel.



First, let's think about the Israelites. They are grumbling, as usual, even though they had just been given manna and quail, in response to their complaining about regretting leaving their Egyptian fleshpots to follow Moses out of Egypt (and slavery). But then there's no water, and again they go after Moses who they petulantly accuse of wanting them – along with their children and livestock – to die of thirst in the desert. I was struck, though, by a comment in the *Collegeville Commentary* about this verse. Obviously, their complaining is not just about being thirsty; they now doubt the whole exodus. Was this really worth it? It doesn't look worth it. But, despite their lack of trust, God does not rebuke them. God,

through Moses, gives them water. God sees them, as they truly are – as people often reveal themselves in the midst of a crisis – and gives them what they need.

Let's think, too, about the woman at the well. Once she gets over the shock of meeting Jesus at the well, where she wasn't expecting to meet anyone, much less a Jewish man – and his confusing request for a drink – she also asks for water so that “[she] may not be thirsty again.” What follows that request is the conversation about the six men she's been connected with in her life, implying a lot – even at our historical distance – about her sexual immorality which has made her an outcast among her Samaritan sisters; that's why she must go to the well at the hottest time of the day when everyone else is at home. But Jesus doesn't rebuke her. He asks her a question, listens to her genuine answer, and affirms her honest response. He gives her what she needs: the water of his life-giving word. Eventually, she shares that back in the village, becoming the first missionary in the process.

And let's think about ourselves. We understand how the Israelites feel, right? “Why did you ever make us leave? Was it just to have us die here?” Sometime, in the absence of ready solutions and what we

think we need, it's easy to grumble. Rather than feel afraid or uncertain, it's tempting to look for someone to blame or to question the motive of those in charge. We understand the woman at the well, too. Sometime, in the absence of ready solutions and what we think we need, it's easy to take whatever comfort we can find, even if we have a sneaking suspicion that it's not all that good for us. We also know how she feels after her encounter with Jesus. We're going about our days, just trying to get by, when something makes us stop and really consider our lives. Maybe it's a prayer or conversation or something we see or sing or read. But it's a moment that demands we come clean about ourselves. That is not usually pretty or fun. But it pulls us into the reality of this moment, right now. And in that moment, God does not rebuke us as we stand there in the truth of our lives. God gives us what we need. Somehow.

I first gave this reflection on March 15, 2020. The world was just going into pandemic lockdown; it was our first Sunday in this community without an ordained celebrant. We were entering an unprecedented time in all of our lives – so many unknowns and so much fear. So much loss. And now the word “unprecedented” has a whole other nuance in light of what's happening to human rights and due process and the state of our democracy. In 2020 there were 27 people in our community; now we are 17. We struggle to know what to do, how to live.

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It's a mantra I cling to. Am I listening? What am I hearing? How am I responding? Is my heart tender and malleable or is it unfeeling and indifferent? Have I been given a job, like the woman at the well? What is God calling me to in this moment? Surely, if the last six years have reminded us of anything, it is that this moment is all we have.

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