

John 4:5-42

So he 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.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 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." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to

do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. 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 truly the Savior of the world."

Sermon

Today's text is one of the richest text in all the the Gospels. Jesus encounter with the Samaritan woman is as deep as Jacob's well, a text that has so much meaning and hope and possibility that we could dip into it for countless weeks and find something new and important and wondrous each time. The richness of this text then asks us to focus each time and identify what the Spirit is teachings us today. In that light, I want to lift up four things about this encounter that has helped me examine who Jesus is, and who I am this week. It is my hope that you might find yourself within this encounter as well.

Let's begin with this, notice who it is that initiates the encounter in this story. There are many reasons why Jesus should not talk with this person the most obvious being that she is a woman and she is a samaritan. Both of these would prevent a good Jew from striking up a conversation. But we also start to hear that she has a bad reputation and a shady past. Why would Jesus want to talk with her? But Jesus breaks through the social and religious rules of the time. Jesus initiates the conversation. Jesus talks with the samaritan woman with a shady past and bad reputation.

I wonder, what rules might Jesus be breaking just to talk with you? What rules might Jesus ask us to break, so that he might talk though you? Not one of us comes to God, comes to Jesus, on equal footing. We all come with barriers placed by our culture and ourselves. Yet it is Jesus who initiates the conversation, not us.

Notice also that it is Jesus who is thirsty. It is Jesus who is tired from the journey and waiting along at the well. He is thirsty and asks the woman for a drink. He cannot do it himself, he has no bucket to lower into the well, no jar to fill. And so Jesus asks for help, asks the Samaritan woman to give him a drink. And in asking for help, Jesus gives her an opportunity to see the divine in her midst.

What does it mean for us if we recognize that we have been given a bucket? What would it mean for us to see that we have the power to quench the thirst of a stranger? What would happen if we knew that in caring for the thirsty stranger, we will see the divine in our midst? Would we be more ready to help? More ready to eager to care?

Notice the order of recognition for the Samaritan woman. It seems so easy for us to get caught up in the supernatural: the healing, the exorcism, the reading of the mind - miracles. The Samaritan woman is astonished at how Jesus knows who she is, about her past, and her present - and she identifies Jesus as first a prophet - one who does the might acts of God. It might be easy for her to stay right there, to only see this thirsty stranger as a Prophet of God, to only see the miraculous. But that is not where Jesus leaves things. Once the door is opened, Jesus reveals more about himself, his purpose his goal. This living water isn't some mystery or wondrous act, but it is the Messianic truth. Here is more than a prophet, here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

How often are we caught up in waiting for, praying for, looking for the miraculous - believing that it is the mighty acts of God that confirm our faith and give us hope. How often do we down play, even ignore the greater act of love and life that has already been given? When we are able to see the Christ, not just a prophet, then we recognize just who God is, we recognize Jesus' redeeming love.

Finally, I notices the words that were said, and those that were not said. Once the disciples arrived, the conversation came to an end, but the story did not. The Samaritan Woman left behind her watering jar and returned to the city. And she began telling anyone and everyone who would listen. "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" This is a woman who had many secrets to hide, a shameful past and things she has worked hard to keep silent about. This could have been something said in fear, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" But something happened in our time with Jesus, something changed her fear into something new. Instead of concern about having her sorted past and difficult present being shared, the Samaritan woman something more. "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!... And loved me anyways!"

There are things in our lives that we work hard to keep others from knowing. Things we are not proud of, things that we fear would separated us from others, ostracize us from society, from family and friends. But what would it be like to be fully known, and still, unconditionally loved. What kind of freedom would that give us, what kind of hope would we find?

Know, just imagine if we were able to share that with someone else today. That God knows all about them: the good, the bad, and the ugly - and God still loves them anyway! Thanks be to Christ for his all knowing, unconditional love. Amen