

John 4:5-42, March 23, 2014

She goes to the well when no one else is there because she knows she will be ignored by the other women who gather there. Her life has not been easy.

As Jesus points out, she has been married five times and the man she is with now is not her husband.

We must be careful here that we don't make assumptions about this woman that are not valid.

This woman may have been widowed five times, or divorced, over which she has not control. She may be living in an arrangement that is perfectly within the levitical law and tradition of the community.

We must be careful to not color this woman in a way that is not supported in the Gospel story.

But she may have had to face the scorn of the other women in the community because of the circumstances of her life anyhow.

This could be why she is coming to the well in the heat of the day rather than in the early morning when the water would normally be collected.

Clearly, life has not been kind to her regardless of the circumstances.

At noon the well would probably be deserted.

She walks slowly with a yoke across her shoulders. A bucket hangs from each end, and the wood cuts into the flesh along the back of her neck.

She takes the pain for granted, but from time to time she stops to shift the weight from one bruise to another.

As she straightens up she sees a man sitting at the well. She thinks of turning and running for the village. She curses and thinks maybe he will

just ignore me and let me get my water, and be on about my business.
Jesus starts a conversation with her

She is a surprising choice for conversation, she is an outsider—a Samaritan—a half-breed, full-blooded pagan as far as the Jews are concerned.

She is also, of course, a woman. Women are not allowed to talk in public, particularly to men, or even worship with men, whose morning devotions include the prayer,
"Thank you, God, that I am not a woman."

Geographically, Samaria is located between Galilee and Judah. Jesus and his disciples are traveling from Judah to Galilee and Jesus stops at a well near a Samaritan town to rest.

This just happens to be Jacob's well located on a route that Jesus could and probably did take on this particular trip. The well is about 100' deep and of course is protected with a circle of stones at the top.

Now the well was probably a little ways outside of town and this is where the woman finds Jesus sitting on the stones, resting.

Jesus lifts his head and asks for a drink;
she sees his olive skin and dark eyes. He is a Jew. What in the world is he doing here? Is he lost? Has his family and friends rejected him?

Jews have rules about what they can eat and drink, who you can talk to. If he drinks water from a Samaritan bucket he'll be breaking the law, but he asks her for help anyway

"Could I have a drink of water?"

"If you knew the gift of God and who you were talking to, you would be asking me and I would give you living water and you would never be thirsty."

Where is this water?

"Give me this water"

so that I never have to face the women at this well.

"Give me this water" so that I can stay at home and pretend everything is fine.

Jesus talks to her as though she matters, and as if her being there in the hottest part of the day is not out of the ordinary.

And this conversation goes on and Jesus and the woman talk about her husbands, the man she is living with, who this man named Jesus is, prophet? Messiah,

where the correct place for worship is, and what is to be worshipped and how.

She then runs off, leaving her jars and tells the people in town to "come and see." Holding out the possibility that this Jesus may be the Messiah!

I want you to notice something here.

Jesus didn't tell her to go off and tell everyone. She did that in response to the words she heard Jesus speak to her; simply because she heard.

The conclusion to the story tells us they came believing because of what the woman had told them. They begged Jesus to stay and he did for 2 days and brought many more to belief through his own word.

The towns people say to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is truly the savior of the world."

This man, Jesus, is not just a prophet like Moses.

Look at what happened here.

Jesus spoke to one woman who came to him, by accident,
by God's own purpose and plan, we don't know.
But, Jesus and this woman met at a well and talked.

This woman then spoke to others about her encounter with Jesus and they came.

One woman heard and was motivated to go and tell others to come and see.

People heard and were motivated to come and see and hear.

They all came to believe in Jesus as the savior of the world.

I know all of you believe that Jesus is the savior of the world. But, I wonder about something.

If Jesus came here today, what would He have to say to you to motivate you?

To get you to say to someone else, "Come and see,
to tell someone else about your encounter with Him?"

I like to think that everything we do here is for the purpose of inviting others to come and see, come and hear so they can believe.

I am not sure we are all into it.

I am troubled by one thing.

One of my concerns after accepting the call this congregation extended to me back in 2011 has come to pass.

My greatest fear back then was that folks would take a deep breath and say,

"Thank you Lord! Finally, we have a pastor, we can take it easy now. We got things back to normal."

And we would enter into a time of great passivity, maybe even apathy.

Don't get me wrong, we needed a little breather after those first two years, and there are people here who do a tremendous amount of work.

It would embarrass them if I started telling you about it so I won't.

But, I need a little more from the rest of you. It only takes a little bit from everyone to make a difference overall.

I need your help. Your church needs your help.

One of our conversations in council is the amount of things I have picked up because no one else was doing them.

As a result my visitations and home communions have fallen off, and the time and energy I have for some other important pastoral work has been diverted to things others should be doing.

This needs to be corrected

During the next two weeks I am going to be working with a couple of other people to identify those things someone else needs to take charge of.

Most of them are not real big things, but if we put them all together they add up in a hurry.

That list will be published when it is done.

While we are doing that I am asking each of you to pray about, think about how you might offer a little of your self, your time, a little bit of the great amount of skill, knowledge, know how, and love for God and for your church to help out.

Then when the list is published you will all see it and some of you will volunteer,

and we will begin making calls to find those who are just waiting to be asked.

In this story from our Gospel lesson today, the disciples didn't agree

with what Jesus was doing, talking to this woman, although they were not brave enough to say anything to Him about it.

But Jesus showed them by talking to her, and then by staying in that Samaritan community for two days teaching them,

By allowing them to see these people coming to belief that Jesus was the savior of the world,

that even the most unlikely are included in the community of faith,

and called to extend the kingdom of God into their community by giving of themselves.

Remember this woman's situation; probably an outcast of her own community!

When she ran off from the well she could have gone home.

But, instead she went back to town and shared what she had been given with them;

Belief that Jesus was the savior of the world.

You come here. You have the opportunity to hear Jesus speak to you in some way;

Through the lessons, in a sermon, in eating and drinking bread and wine, in hearing the water splash in the baptismal font all through the service,

in the voice and words of someone else with whom you share this time, space and a common belief that Jesus is the savior of the world.

He speaks to your heart, your weary soul, to your fears, your hurts, sorrows, your loneliness, your grief,

your celebrations, accomplishments, your joys

How will His words motivate you to invite others to come and see, to come and hear,

to come and believe as you do that Jesus is the savior of the world

too?

Amen