

3.12.2023 Lent 3

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

“Living Water”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well is a story about how Jesus meets us as we are, offering us the living water of eternal life. Like the Samaritan woman, we are also encountered by Jesus. What was so remarkable about this ancient conversation is that two millennia later, we are still going to the well of this story to draw the living water of eternal life.

The first thing we notice in this story is that Jesus is at the center of daily life. Jesus was sitting by Jacob’s well, the center of community life, where people came daily to draw water. The Samaritan woman was indeed surprised that Jesus initiated the conversation. Jesus would have been recognizable as a Jew, because of the prayer shawl or tallit that he wore (which is referred to in the healing of the woman who touched the fringe of Jesus’ garment in Mt. 9:20-22).

The Samaritan woman responded to Jesus with surprise, “*How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?*” The woman was stunned that Jesus had spoken to her because Jews and Samaritans did not recognize one another and did not share any community together. Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim, while devout Jews worshipped at the Temple in Jerusalem. Ethnic and national differences were not only divisive, but the physical places of worship also separated these two ethnic groups. We might say that this conversation would never have happened if it were not for the person of Jesus, who crosses borders between people and groups, meeting us where we are.

In addition, Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman in as a man and quickly crossed social boundaries by asking her to call her husband. This verbal exchange is crucial because Jesus revealed that the woman had had five husbands, and the man she lived with was not her husband. Jesus quickly went to the center of her life, revealing a reality about her that perhaps she had sought to keep hidden from the world. Jesus had held up a mirror to her and she recognized that she was talking with someone very special. She asked if Jesus was a prophet.

Jesus met the woman at the well, revealing who she was. She was a woman of a different ethnicity, nation, gender, and religion who now lived with one who was not her husband. In a matter of seconds, Jesus understood the reality of the Samaritan woman – and she knew it.

Why did Jesus have this conversation? Imagine all of the other conversations Jesus had had

with people that were never written down – conversations that understood and helped people where they were. Jesus had this conversation because this is who he is: the Messiah. Jesus continues to speak to us, revealing who we are in our particularity: our ethnicity, nationality, gender identity and our religious life. Jesus meets us as we are so that he can lead us into new life.

Jesus wanted the woman to know that we are much more than simply the color of our skin, our ethnicity, nationality, or our gender identity. Jesus makes it clear to us that we are all created to worship God in spirit and truth. We have been created by God with a spirit to know God's truth about ourselves and about God's love for all humanity.

Yet too often, we react in the way that the Samaritan woman initially reacted to Jesus. We are often looking only at the surface level, and our view of others is often only skin deep. In Jesus, the Samaritan woman saw only a Jewish man. We, too, often only see skin color, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity and religious differences between people. Without even knowing it, we can close our community to people who are from "the outside," or at the very least we can make people feel unwelcome, because "they aren't from around here." The woman said as much to Jesus in surprise, "*How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?*"

Jesus came into the location of her daily life and tasks, only to go beyond all of our human constructions about ethnic, national, geographical, gender, and religious differences to reveal our shared humanity with one another and with himself as people of spirit and truth.

Though this story has often been told in a way that casts the Samaritan woman as a great sinner, Jesus never once condemned her or told her that she must become Jewish or worship in Jerusalem. She probably continued to worship for the rest of her life on Mount Gerizim, yet she was also changed by her encounter with the Messiah. She learned that she was created to worship God in spirit and truth, and she told others to "come and see" Jesus, the Messiah. They also believed.

Do we always meet others, who we see as different from ourselves, as Jesus meets us? We may look, speak and worship differently from our neighbor, but Jesus encounters all of us – not in our differences, but in our createdness. We are one race, one human family. We are flesh and spirit, and far too often, we look at people only in the visible differences of their complexion, nationality, gender, or religion. Jesus doesn't meet us only at the surface level. Jesus doesn't place us in categories apart from one another; rather, Jesus frees us to live in spirit and truth, worshipping God and loving our neighbor. Jesus meets us in our thirst and hunger, saying, "*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.”*

This is why we keep drawing living water from the well of this story. We need the God who quenches our thirst and feeds our spirit so that, like the Samaritan woman, we might live to tell others about Jesus. She went back to her community saying, “*Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Can this be the Messiah?*” Many came to know Jesus through her.

Jesus encounters us revealing who we truly are in the midst of our differences and brokenness, not to shame or condemn us, but that we might be washed clean and forgiven in baptism, and nourished at his holy table of welcome for all people.

The challenge for us as individuals and as a church is to welcome people as Jesus welcomes us. We are to look at our neighbor not only in their ethnicity, gender, or religious difference, but as people like us, as people of spirit and truth.

To be a Christian is to be Jesus to others, to meet others as they are so that they might know the unconditional welcome and love of Jesus.

As Jesus gave the Samaritan woman living water, Jesus has washed you with water gushing up to eternal life.

Share Jesus with whomever you meet. Welcome others as they are. In you, others will meet Jesus – the well and source of living water. Amen.