

The Third Sunday in Lent
St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Marcia M. Lockwood
Sunday, March 19, 2017
Text - John 4:5-42 (Year A)

Let us pray.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

"Come and see a man who told me everything I've ever done. He cannot be the Messiah can he?"

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We are here today and it's the third Sunday in Lent! We're roughly at the midway point on our journey with Jesus to Jerusalem. And today we find ourselves in the unlikely land of Samaria. This story is so rich with detail and meaning, it would take us all day to unpack it all. But for now I would like you to use your imagination. Imagine yourself at the well with Jesus and the Samaritan woman. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? How does this story touch you. How can you get into the space as if you were there?

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This past week as I was reflecting on this story, I saw something I never noticed before. Jesus and the Samaritan woman are at well because both of them have broken the rules. Both of them have stepped out of the conventional practices of their day. Jesus is a Jew and the woman is a Samaritan. In their day Jews and Samaritans were arch enemies! So they wouldn't have even spoken to each other. In fact, they would have gone out of their way to avoid any contact whatsoever!

On this particular day, Jesus is making his way from Judea back to Galilee. Any other Jew would have gone around Samaria, by way of the Jordan Valley, to avoid any contact with Samaritans. But Jesus purposely goes straight through the middle to make sure he meets up with the very people he is supposed to avoid at all costs. As a result, he finds himself at the well.

The Samaritan woman, on the other hand has taken a very different approach. It was the practice in her day, that women in the village would go early in morning, to draw water from the well because it was the coolest time of day. No one would go in the heat of the day. Yet, the Samaritan woman decides to go at noon, the hottest time of the day! Why would she do that?

We get a clue from their conversation. Did you notice the strange thing Jesus said to the Samaritan woman? Right in the middle of their conversation? He says, "You have

had five husbands, and the man with whom you are currently living, is not your husband." That's an unusual thing to say when the two have just met! But notice, he makes no judgment of her. He says this because he wants her to realize that he knows something about her that he would otherwise not know. This amazes her so much that she responds by calling him a prophet!

Perhaps she is feeling some shame because of her background. We don't know the circumstances about her five husbands. Scripture is silent about that. But the fact she comes to the well at noon by herself, we can surmise that she didn't want to run into anyone she knew. She purposely went when she thought she would be alone. There's some shame associated with that.

Haven't each of us done something in our lives about which we are not proud? Something for which others have perhaps judged us? I suspect the woman had experienced enough judgment that she didn't want to hear anymore. So she goes to well and there she encounters Jesus!

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What makes this story unique is that Jesus and the Samaritan woman have broken the rules and they end up together. And they continue to break the rules in their conversation - rules about gender, rules about ethnicity, rules about their culture. And they end up overcoming their differences and enter into a relationship. And it's because of this relationship that transformation is made possible.

When the woman calls Jesus a prophet, Jesus takes the conversation to a deeper level and lets her know that he's more than a prophet. He is of God! "I am he!" He says. And it's only then that she dares to believe, that maybe she has in fact encountered the Messiah. And she drinks deeply of the "living water" that he offers her. And it touches her in the depth of her soul.

Another interesting thing is that this woman had gone to great lengths to avoid the people of her village. Now she can't get back fast enough to tell them what happened. "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done and loves me anyway! He can't be the Messiah, can he?" And the people come and experience the "living water" themselves and proclaim that Jesus is the Savior of the world!

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It's a powerful thing to encounter living God. It's an awesome thing to drink the "living water" so freely given. Years ago I found myself grieving deeply over the death of my friend's twelve year old son, our son's best friend, who died the week before Christmas. It was a very difficult year for me. Then, a year later, 'to the day,' I was looking out our bedroom window, when out of the blue, I was overwhelmed by a sense of peace and calm I had never experienced before. And I heard the words, "Do not be afraid, and lo, I am with you 'til the end of time." Then it was gone! But, in that moment, something

deep and profound happened. It was like time itself stopped. And in that brief moment, I felt a sense of love, greater than I had ever known. That encounter was none other than God himself, and it changed my life forever!

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In Her book, The Sacred Meal, Nora Gallagher, writes about the different ways we receive holy communion. She writes, "It's dangerous to open your hands, because you don't know what will end up in them." This, she says, may have been the smartest thing Jesus ever did. He must have thought, "How can I make people step into the unknown? How can I get them to let in some surprise? I know, I'll figure out a way for them to put their hands out in front of themselves, empty. Empty to receive all that God in Christ intends for you."

It is my hope, as you come forward this morning to receive the holy food and drink of communion, that you will drink deeply the "living water" that Christ offers to you, that the parched places where you thirst will be quenched, and your wounded spots healed. It's God's gift to you! And as you leave this place, I hope you will take with you your own version of the Samaritan woman's words, "Come and see a man who knows everything I have ever done and loves me anyway! Surely, he is the Messiah, the Savior of the world." Amen.