

## **Lent 3 March 12 2023**

### **John 4:5-42**

She goes at noon. This unnamed woman of Samaria. But you do not go to the well at noon. In the heat of the day. You go in the morning and at night when you need water. When it is cooler. You go and chat with your neighbors, and share the local news... who is getting married, having a new child, opening a shop. She goes at noon. When no one is there. To Jacob's well. Wells are a place of betrothal in Jewish history. Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah. All meet at a well. And this woman of Samaria would know that. Reminded, each time she goes, that she is not like Rebecca, or Rachel, or Zipporah. That she will have no happy ending. No ancestors. We don't know for sure, but it is possible, likely, that she goes at noon because she is not welcome with the rest of the women. Does not feel comfortable being with them, because of her background. Perhaps she no longer wants to hear the cutting words that are spoken deliberately loud enough for her to hear. Or, in some ways even more unbearable, just being ignored. Left out of conversations and laughter. As if she were not there. Because of her past, who she is.

We don't know why for sure, but she goes at noon. When no "normal" person would be there. But there is. A man. A Jew by the look of him. Alone. A moment fraught for her. Best to keep her head down, get her water, and move along. But then he speaks. To her. "Give me a drink." Startled, she looks at him. And despite herself, her heart is moved. He looks so tired. Hot, sweaty, thirsty. But smiling at her. Open and honest, if weary.

Almost without thought she responds, she knows who she is. Her place in the world. “You do know you aren’t supposed to be speaking to me, much less asking something of me. You are a Jew and I a Samaritan- we have nothing to do with one another.” Why are you talking to me, she wonders?

Jesus looks at her more closely. Perhaps thinking how like Nicodemus she is. Attentive to how this world thinks of righteousness. Focused on the wrong thing. “If you knew, understood, the grace of God and who is asking you for a drink you would ask me for living water.”

Confused, fully engaged in the conversation with Jesus, forgetting her “place” she responds, “You don’t have any bucket, the well is deep. Exactly how will you get this water?”

Again, the smile. Jesus tries to explain- like Nicodemus and being born from above. Jesus points to the well. “Drink from this and you will become thirsty again. Drink from the water I bring, and it will become a fountain of living water within you. You will never thirst again.”

Almost without thought, the woman of Samaria responds/commands, “Give me this water! So I will not be thirsty and never have to come here to this well again.” Do you hear desperation in her command to Jesus? The possible thoughts in her head. Never have to come to this well again. Never have to experience my failed life. Never face my loneliness. Never have to see the dryness of her life. How her heart lifts within her at this promised hope. Relief.

“Go, call your husband and come back.” The pain cuts through her. A punch in the gut. All that she is, her life, comes back to her. Bitterly honest she replies, “I

have no husband". In that society as much to say, I have no place. No value. No family. Giving voice to the most painful thing in her life to an outsider- a Jew!- because there is no one in her own life who would listen. Care.

"You have spoken truth. You have had five husbands, and the one you are with now is not your husband." She looks at him sharply, with an intake of breath. But she is met not by derision or a look of disgust. But rather a face with a gentle smile. A statement of fact with no judgment. No condemnation. A recognition of the truth- that this status that has so defined her place in the community is not one she can control. We don't know what happened. But either the previous husbands died, or they divorced her. A man could divorce his wife for any reason, but the primary reason would be that she is barren. Unable to have children. Whether she has had 5 husbands die, or been divorced as many times, or some combination of the two, her life has been filled with pain, instability, social rejection. Such that she cannot seem to bear marriage once again but needs the support only a male can bring in that society. Even though it would mean social rejection.

Hearing Jesus' response, what he knows about her (similar to Jesus and Nathaniel in John 1:48) she senses- just like Nicodemus and his friends- that something is different in Jesus. "You are a prophet", she says. And asks about the main thing separating Jews and Samaritans. The question of where God is. In the Temple in Jerusalem or on the sacred mountain in Samaria near where they sit, Mt. Gerazim. Jesus' response is that God is in him. Present now. A well spring of living water that will quench her thirst. Who has come to her at this well. And in

that one conversation changes her. Transforms her. What passed between them? As they gazed at one another as the disciples returned.

We don't know. But at that moment she turns back to the city and leaves behind her jar. She goes back into the city without her water. What she came for. The thing that seemed so important for life is left behind. Her fear is left behind. The seemingly insurmountable wall that separated her from the rest of the town is gone. Or maybe just overcome. She leaves behind the jar and goes to the people who very likely had shunned her. The ones whose actions or inactions had led her to coming only at noon. But they are still, her people. So, she begins to tell her people about Jesus.

What does she tell them? He told me about who I am. He saw the real me. With my imperfections and unrighteousness. With my living in sin. But, unlike you, he talked to me anyway. Came to me in that way. He offered me not water that keeps me coming back, but water that keeps springing up in me. A wellspring of eternal water. To quench thirst, to wash clean. To wake me in the morning and lull me to sleep at night. He came to me and spoke to me when I was left alone because you all thought I wasn't good enough. He heard and spoke my truth without condemnation. He solved not just my immediate problem but gave me the answer to my deepest problem. Thirst. Thirst for relationship. Thirst for forgiveness. Thirst for community. Thirst for God.

What is it that we pursue in life? Well water or the spring of living water?

One will slake our thirst for a time. But we will get thirsty again. The other, once given, will never run dry. Will mean we never thirst again for that which truly brings life.

I'm in 2 Kings now in my reading through the Bible. A seemingly endless list of Kings of Israel and Judah and the none too spectacular history of their reigns. But what is consistent, is that their ultimate failure lies in trusting something or someone other than God. Is literally worshipping other gods. Or substituting their own wisdom and discernment for that of God. Pursing well water. Military power. Political power. Wealth. Glory. To preserve their name in wondrous buildings and projects. But time and again finding that each is fleeting. Momentary, even when counted in years. Finding that even when we have an abundance we seem to thirst for more. Or that we have to keep coming back, doing more, laboring just to keep what seems to be enough.

Does that sound familiar?

But in Jesus, we have been given a well spring to eternal life.

God come to us, claiming us... in water. Just like Brooke will be claimed this morning. Water that is not just well water, but a wellspring of living water that will continue to bubble up in her from this moment on. A spring of living water that lies within each of us who have received that bath in the name of the Triune God. Who has had that seal of the cross marked on our foreheads and heard the promise- Child of God- you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

A well spring that never runs dry. That promises always, every day, no matter what to look at the real you. With all your imperfections and unrighteousness. With your sin. And say, you are beloved child of God. And bathe us with water that washes away our sin. Showers us with grace and forgiveness. To mark once again that cross on our forehead and remind us that we are a baptized child of

God with whom God is well pleased. And we will never thirst for that again because we have been given that gift by the same one who gave it to the woman of Samaria that day. Jesus.

And what those waters did for her, they do for us. Bring us into community. Open us to relationship, with God- yes, but also one another. Even those who have hurt us. Even those who seem to have it all together. Because we know the truth- that what they have is just well water. They will be thirsty again. And what we have found is so amazing! It must be shared. If we have a shred of love for our neighbor, for our community and how we live together, it must be shared. Because in Jesus, the fount of living water. In his love for you, for ya'll, for the world, the cosmos... he makes things right again.

Friends in Christ, what is it that you pursue in life? Well water or the spring of living water?

Listen to this Word, come to this font, this table, and drink from the wellspring of living water and never thirst again.