

**March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**3rd Sunday of Lent**

**Exodus 17: 1-7**

**Psalm 95**

**John 4: 5-42**

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

*Jesus 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?" 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."

***In the name of the Holy Three. Amen.***

**This story of the Samaritan woman is unusual in the Gospels as we get full and rich details about her encounter with Jesus, as well as the lively dialogue between the two of them. In fact, this dialogue is the longest conversation recorded in the New Testament, between Jesus and anyone. And though the story is, of course, a few thousand years old, if we allow it, the story can be vivid and current and speak directly to us.**

**First, a few details to clarify the reading. To begin, Jesus and his friends are traveling through Samaria, the territory between Galilee and Judea, and**

though the Samaritans were Jews, they were the wrong kind of Jews. Old disagreements between these sub-groups had long ago calcified, and religious and racial prejudices had formed, and had been going for over 700 years by the time Jesus and this woman speak.

Thus, a Samaritan Jew was about the worst person you could imagine meeting, if you were a Jew from Galilee, like Jesus and his friends.

Second, the fact that Jesus is speaking to a woman is shocking enough in that society, but the fact that she is a Samaritan, and a woman was almost unbelievable in those times; Jewish men and Samaritan women would NEVER have spoken.

Third, the woman has come at noon to draw water, and of course, with the sun blazing overhead, she is the only one there. She has chosen to come at this deserted hour because she is an outcast in the town, looked down on and gossiped about for those 5 husbands, and now living with a man she is not married to.

So, she does not come at dawn or dusk, as the other women would, to draw water together and have time to visit in the cooler times of day, a social gathering as well as necessary work. No, she would rather come in the heat of the day, then risk the looks and whispers of the others. So, the woman has three strikes, Samaritan, female, and social outcast. She has three strikes against her, when Jesus speaks to her.

Now, how might this story speak across so many years to challenge each of us in this season of Lent?

First, we need to allow the story to come a bit closer to us. We might be interested in knowing the history of the Samaritans and the Jews. Or we might want to understand gender inequality in the time of Jesus. Ok, those are interesting angles, but they keep the story at arm's length, interesting, but not ours.

But just suppose, we wonder for a moment, who is the Samaritan woman in our world? Who has three strikes with us, who do we dismiss, who are we sure we know by outward appearances, ethnicity, race, gender? Who gets no chance in our world?

I remember many years ago, in the 1980s, the church I attended hosted a gathering of teenagers from Northern Ireland, an equal number of Catholic

and Protestant teens. This truly noble effort invited the teens to travel away from their troubled land, and to live in community for a few weeks and get to know the other, get to know the one they viewed as having three or more strikes, the one they had been taught to hate since they were born.

For us, as the American adults, to hear those young people, in their beautiful lilting voices, to hear them speak casually of the hatred they had been taught, from the cradle, was stunning. And stunning too was to see their young courage trying to walk a new path with each other.

So, in this Lenten season our Gospel asks us each to ponder who we were taught from the cradle to hate, just because of who they were, whether it was an ethnic group or a branch of our own family.

Who is Jesus speaking to at the well in our life, who is the one we dismiss, and yet Jesus chooses and speaks to and blesses?

Second and finally, this reading pushes us and challenges us further. It does not appear in the season of Lent by chance. To notice the challenge to us we need to hear again the Samaritan woman's words:

*"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! (He knows me inside and out!) He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"*

Imagine now sitting with Jesus and he tells you everything, everything you have ever done, since you could walk and talk, until now, until today, Sunday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, everything.

We all have five husbands somewhere, not literally perhaps, but five mistakes, five thoughtless, cruel words, five greedy choices, five broken places, five regrets, five retched, embarrassing times.

And then to know that we, just like the Samaritan woman, are invited to meet Jesus and to realize that he KNOWS us, that he CAN tells us everything we have ever done, and then, to know too the unspoken part of the woman's invitation:

*"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done"....and loves me still.*

And loves me still.....

In this Lenten season, we are invited, not required but invited, to go to the well. And we, like the woman, get to choose, will we simply get our water quickly, ignore the stranger asking us for water, and go on with our days as

usual? It is easier sometimes to live unknown, unforgiven by our God, because if we stay at the well, and offer the water and talk and remember our five retched, broken places, we could receive the fresh cool glorious water of being known, forgiven, and loved by our God.

Well, then, things might change. We can't skulk around at noon anymore, avoiding folks. We, like the Samaritan woman, will not be able to help telling others of our God of deep forgiveness and deep love.

And we never know what might happen, if we tell others of our God, walls may be broken down.

After hearing the woman's exclamation: "*He told me everything I have ever done!*" her Samaritan neighbors invited Jesus to stay with them, a request so extreme and absurd, a request beyond belief. And yet, Jesus says yes, and doesn't just stay a polite hour, he stays 2 days with those hated Samaritans!

What more might happen if we too say yes, if at that lonely noon hour, we tell our story, and receive "*(t)he water that....will become...a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.*"

Amen.