



“Are You Dying...To Be Water Born?”

Third Sunday In Lent

Sunday, March 15, 2020

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Exodus 17:1–7; John 4:5–42

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

This is such a great story, with so much going on, that I'm afraid we might tend to miss the more important parts, because they seem boring by comparison. We start out with some basic groundwork: Jesus and his disciples are heading north to Galilee and stop for rest at a well. It's around noon, and the disciples have gone into town to purchase food, leaving Jesus all alone. Along comes a woman, to get water from the well.

Let's stop there, because there are SO many things in these first few verses that we need to understand for this whole thing to make a lot more sense. Jesus is in Samaria. That's the part of the country north of Jerusalem that fell to the Assyrians back around 722 BC. The people inter-married with the invaders, and pretty much (in the eyes of the southern believers) ceased to exist, at least in the eyes of the Southern believers. Samaritans not only inter-married with surrounding peoples, but they have the audacity to worship, not in Jerusalem like the Israelis, but at Mount Gerizim – which is *Not* Jerusalem. Samaritans are to Israelis kind of like crazy cousin Nancy is to the rest of the family: you know you're related, but you *really* don't want anything to do with her, and you **Definitely** don't want anyone else to know you're related. Israelites and Samaritans don't talk with each other or socialize with one another.

Jesus and his crew are near a town called Sychar, maybe forty-ish miles north of Jerusalem. There's a well there. It's called *Jacob's Well*, after the guy who supposedly dug it. Jacob, as in one of Abraham's grandsons. Jacob, as in father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob, as in “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Social convention of the day says men and women who are **not** related to each other generally shouldn't engage in conversation with one another. And an Israelite would *not* start up a conversation with a Samaritan in anything *short* of a life or death situation, and even then, the Israeli would have to *really* think about whether it was worth it or not.

Our reading says it's noon. This woman is coming out to get water. Water weighs around eight pounds a gallon. If you don't have running water in your house (which, in first century Palestine, you *don't* have running water in your house), you have to carry all your water needs to your house. You're probably *not* going to do so one gallon at a time; more likely, you're filling up a five-gallon clay jug. So, you're looking at easily forty-five pounds to fifty pounds. If you're going to lug forty-five pounds around, you want to do it when the temperature is *cool* out, not when in the hot afternoon sun. So, you want to do it in the morning time. Wells act as social gathering site, a chance to catch up with the neighbors, find out the latest news, whatever. If you *don't* want to interact with your neighbors, for whatever reason, you don't go and get your water in the morning – you get your water later

in the day. As to WHY might you not want to interact with your neighbors, we can only speculate. There might be some social stigma going on, like you're being shunned, or ignored, or made fun of, by your neighbors.

So, this woman – this SAMARITAN woman – comes to the well, at noon, which implies she has some social stigma attached to her. And Jesus – **who should know better** – starts talking with her. They have a pretty normal exchange – normal, that is, on her part, because she's someone who is following the societal norms of the day, AND SHE TRIES TO CORRECT JESUS!

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

The author of the gospel even jumps in to try to explain:

Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans. (Verse 9)

So, Jesus, having thrown all social convention out the window, just dives right in with this esoteric stuff:

"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." (Verse 10)

What?! I wouldn't be at all surprised if she started looking around for the empty wine skins, thinking that this guy must be drunk. The woman tries to bring the conversation back into this plane of reality:

"Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.

Then she tries to reason with him:

Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

We've got to give this woman some serious credit here, because she's simply trying to get water in peace, not wanting to be bothered by whatever kind of a difficult time her neighbors would give her, and this weirdo Israelite starts talking to her about "living water."

But then Jesus starts really delving into the God-talk, giving her reason to believe him. He tells her that he knows she has been married five times and is currently simply cohabitating with a fellow. He tells her that the *place* we worship is not as important as the fact that we **do** worship. And, more importantly, that we worship the LGA, because it is **God's spirit** that is present when we worship.

Next, we get the mind blower, because when the woman says, "I know the Messiah is coming," Did you catch how Jesus responds?

"I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Jesus proclaims himself to be The Messiah, the harbinger of God! So, either, Jesus is nuttier than a fruit cake, or...he truly is who he says he is.

Now, when the disciples get back, they see this social nightmare of their Jewish teacher talking, by himself, to this Samaritan woman. And I find it rather surprising that they manage to keep their own mouths shut, and not immediately begin to berate Jesus, or chastise the woman, for doing the totally socially unacceptable thing of *talking* with each other.

But after declaring himself to be The Messiah, the woman leaves. She does this astounding thing, of talking with the other townspeople (who she has been trying to avoid): *You've got to come on out to the well and hear this guy who is out there. I think he's honestly The Messiah!*

Meanwhile, Jesus tries to get his disciples to comprehend what he was trying to accomplish by talking with this woman.

Our story wraps up with the townspeople all coming out to see Jesus for themselves and declare him Savior. Again, a whole bunch of SAMARITANS are conversing *with*, and listening *to*, this Jewish teacher!

Jesus talked to this woman about water. He knows how important water is to us in our daily lives. Just last week, I had the privilege and honor to preside at the baptism of one of our Affirmation of Baptism students. This fourteen-year-old young woman stood before the congregation, as I poured water over her head. She stood there, as she was infused with the Spirit of God. Water, and the Spirit, changed her life.

Let me ask you these questions: Have you ever had a God moment, like this woman had? You think your life is going along, for good or for bad, or simply going, and you're setting about your day, doing your regular daily things, when, **BAM!** you encounter God in a totally surprising place, in a completely unforeseen manner. What did you do? How did you react? How did that encounter affect your life?

Who is it in your life with whom you do not get along, like Israelites and Samaritans? Why don't you get along? Can you change that? Do you want to change that? Can those reasons be rectified? Can you still love that person (or persons), regardless of your differences?

How does water change your life? By drinking; cooking; cleaning; bathing; swimming. Does water affect you in other ways, as well?

Finally, what was Jesus striving to accomplish by talking with this woman? Okay, *this* one I'll answer: He was trying to get her to be water-born. He wanted to see her filled with God's Spirit. He wants to see **us** filled with God's Spirit.

We can't look for them, we can't plan them, but, please, be willing to be open to those God moments when they come into your life. Be willing to have your life changed, like this woman at the well. Be willing to be water born. Amen.

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