

Third Sunday in Lent
"Living Water"
John 4:5-42

In today's Gospel, we have probably one of the more familiar events of Jesus' life. Sometimes you hear this passage referred to as the story of "Jesus and the woman at the well." And for each familiar story about Jesus we probably also have in mind a familiar interpretation of that story.

So let me ask you, as you think about "the woman at the well" what do you remember about this story? What would you say this story is about?

One common way to understand this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, is to see it as a "grace story" a story of God's grace toward a woman who had led a sinful life, a woman, who the text tells us, has had five husbands and lives with a man who is not her husband.

A second familiar interpretation is to see it as a "hospitality story." The Samaritan people were religious outcasts, and as John reminds us in today's Gospel, Jews and Samaritans "had no dealings" with one another. Yet, this Samaritan woman who would've been ignored by any other Jewish man, is greeted and welcomed by Jesus.

Now, both of these interpretations help us see some important dimensions of the story. But, this morning, I'd like to invite you to look at this story from a new perspective. This morning, as you think about the "woman at the well" I want you to see this story as a "faith story" a story showing us how God works to create faith. Listen to hear how Jesus speaks to the heart of one who is thirsty, giving her the Living Water, of eternal life.

Today's Gospel gives us a great opportunity to see God at work. In the whole New Testament, this story stands apart, as the longest recorded conversation between Jesus and any other person.

God is up to something and today we have the opportunity to see and hear for ourselves what that is.

So first of all, we notice that when the Samaritan woman comes to the well, she is looking for water. She's not there looking for Jesus.

We also notice that John tells us the time of day. It's around noon, and getting close to the hottest part of the day. It's a time when most people would avoid going to the well, because carrying a heavy jar of water is something you would do in the morning, not during the heat of the day. So it's fair to guess, that she was trying to come to the well when no one else was around possibly due to her very low social status.

And here she meets a Jewish man or I should say Jesus meets her.
And he asks her for a drink of water.

So, it's not hard to picture why she is taken a back and wants to know what his agenda is.

When Jesus responds by offering her "living water"
it's also not hard to picture why she would've been so skeptical.
He didn't even have a bucket to draw water with. What was this crazy man talking about,
gift of God, living water?

By, now she was more than skeptical. This strange man, with his offer of a mysterious gift,
made her want to know more, and she was thirsty!

Then Jesus says to her, that "everyone who drinks (from this well) will be thirsty again,
but those who drink of the water that I will give them, will never thirst."

Now, she definitely wanted to know more.

So Jesus continued, "The water that I will give will become in them, a spring of water, gushing
up to eternal life." Not knowing exactly what to make of this, but now beginning to take a few
steps forward in faith, she declared, "Sir, give me this water."

Then something even more interesting happens.
Out of the blue she hears Jesus tell her about her past,
and she realizes that she must be speaking with a prophet of God, a prophet who points
beyond the differences between Samaritans and Jews, a prophet who points to the worship of
God in spirit and truth.

Again, you can just picture her taking this all in, in total amazement.

No longer is she skeptical, now she's moved beyond curiosity and she declares her belief in the
coming of the Messiah.

And Jesus says to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

And John tells us she has heard for herself, and she believes.
Jesus, the Word of God, has met her right where she is.
All the barriers have been broken down and God has acted to create faith in this woman.

How do we know this?

We know this because the living water of Christ has already begun to overflow in her heart.
John tells us that she responds to the Good News by leaving her water jar and returning to the
city to tell everyone what had happened. And while many Samaritans from that city came to

believe in Jesus through this woman's testimony, John tells us that many more believed because Jesus came to stay with them.

And they said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you have said that we believe, for we have now heard for ourselves and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

In Romans, chapter 10, we hear:

"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!
Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message,
and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

We know this is how God works.

Faith comes from hearing the good news that God meets us right where we are, with the love of his Son, Jesus. Faith comes when we hear this Word for ourselves.

When you think back, what times in your life do you remember when this message of God's mercy and love was especially real and personal for you?

Who do you remember speaking the Word of God, so that it came as living water during a time when you were especially thirsty?

Was it a parent, a friend, a teacher or pastor?

Was it during a time when you were discouraged, when you were ill, or going through a personal or family crisis?

We all need to hear this good news of our precious worth in God's eyes, and we all need people in our lives who will lift us up and remind us of God's promises, and help us remember God's faithfulness. Their words, which are God's words, can be life-giving to us.

I'd like to close by sharing with you how one father shared the "living water" of Jesus, with his daughter Nicole.

A number of years ago I heard, Nicole, a girl from North Dakota, tell this story in her own words. This was a story about the first time in her life she remembers feeling surrounded by the love of God, sensing how real God is and how precious she is to God.

Nicole told us about the time when she was still a little girl and she remembers asking her dad, "Dad, why do you believe in God?"

You can just imagine his reaction. His mouth probably dropped open, as he looked in wonder at his little girl realizing how important his answer to this question was going to be.

After a long pause he reached down and took Nicole up in his arms, and he said,

"Nicole, before you were born I don't think I could've answered that question very confidently. I remember struggling with believing in God. But when you were born, I remember holding you in my arms, and looking down at this beautiful little creature, and thinking a lot about God. Up until that time, I had never been as certain that there was a God. Your birth seemed like a miracle and it showed me how much God must love us."

For Nicole, knowing what God meant to her dad has been one of the biggest influences in her whole life. This is how she "heard for herself", how much God loves her. This is how she heard the "Living Water" of Christ.

Today, the hope that you and I share is in the same God, who met Nicole. The God who delights in our birth, who counts us as precious and worthy of love and who continues to meet us right where we are and satisfies our deepest thirst.

May the Living water who is Jesus Christ, spring up anew, in your life today. Amen