

Weekend of Sunday, March 15, 2020
3rd Sunday in Lent /Lectionary X/Proper X/Year A
First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7
Second Reading: Romans 5:1-11
Gospel Reading: John 4:5-42
Sermon Title: “Drinking in Jesus”

Theme

Jesus defies convention to engage a Samaritan woman in conversation. Her testimony, in turn, leads many others to faith.

Text

⁵[Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)⁹The 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.)¹⁰Jesus 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.”¹¹The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. 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?”¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴but 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.”¹⁵The 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.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.”¹⁷The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’;¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”¹⁹The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman,

believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But 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. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷Just 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?” ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do 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. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They 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.”

Sermon

Welcome to the sermon time for the weekends of Lent.

This Lent I will be preaching and teaching on the theme of "Journey with Jesus through John" and throughout this and the next two weeks I will be unpacking a couple of themes. One of those themes is *knowing*, or *knowledge* and some questions you can expect us to explore are:

- What do we, or can we know for sure?
- Does God revealed in Jesus Christ want to be known?
- How is it that God revealed in Jesus Christ seems to know us so well?

And then as I mentioned in the sermon last weekend, it is my opinion that Lent is supposed to be a season of *observation*. You see, it appears to me that the Gospel Readings this Lent are stories of Jesus doing something and all we can do is observe him. He cannot or does not ask us to "go and do likewise." It would appear that what we are to do during Lent is simply observe him, although there are certainly lessons we can learn and actions we can take which I will bring out at the conclusion.

Finally, let's get started with the Gospel Reading for today. You know the story, but you may not be as well acquainted with the rest of the story.

In First Century Palestine, carrying the water from well to the home was women's work. Make no mistake about it, the pottery vessels they carried it in were heavy when they were empty, then add seven pounds per gallon and you do the math.

Women made it more tolerable and safe by going to the well in groups and helping each other dip the water. Now I am not one of those who say that all women do is gossip, but some do and so it was a way for them to catch up on each other's children and news of the community. They also did this hard work in the morning before the heat of the day would have made it intolerable.

But in the story of the woman at the well, there are some details that John included that are quite telling. For example, John wrote that the story took place at noon – in

the heat of the day. Even Jesus Christ the Lord got tired and overheated and sat down for a rest.

John also wrote that the setting was a Samaritan city. The Samaritans were a group of people who lived in Samaria - an area north of Jerusalem. They were half-Jews and half-Gentiles. When Assyria captured the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. some were taken in captivity while others left behind. The ones left behind intermarried with the Assyrians. Thus these people were neither fully Hebrews nor fully Gentiles. The Samaritans had their unique copy of the Torah, the first five books of Scripture as well as their unique system of worship and their temple. At the time of Jesus, the Jews and the Samaritans did not deal with one another.

And the third minor detail you need to be aware of is that John wrote that this one Samaritan woman came alone. Now let me ask you, why would the Samaritan woman go the well alone at high noon?

We don't learn the answer until midway through the story. As it turns out, the woman has been unlucky in love. She has been married five times and at that present moment, she had given up on marriage and was just living with some guy. She came to the well alone at high noon, because she was often the subject of the gossip that the rest of the women shared, and to avoid the humiliation she came alone later in the day.

There are so many layers to their conversation that we could take hours to unpack it all, but by the end of the conversation, this we know, the Samaritan woman was a believer, and though she was a woman of ill-repute, she led her entire community to faith in Jesus as well.

So let's move on to the three questions we are exploring this Lent.

- What do we, or can we know for sure?

Jesus was not about to be held back by social conventions that had nothing to do with God. Social convention said that a Jewish man should not even talk to a woman let alone an unclean Samaritan woman. But in this woman, Jesus saw someone who was burdened and not by the water she was fetching, but by her own miserable life.

He knew that, despite social convention, he could bring wholeness to her, forgive her, lift her up, and restore her to the person God had intended her to be that had been snuffed out of her by everyone else.

- Does God revealed in Jesus Christ want to be known?

The answer is not always yes, and I don't know why that is, but at least in this story, he flat out told the woman that he is the Messiah! And by the end of this story, the woman had gone back to her village and told them,

²⁹"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" And as a result of her testimony, many more came to believe in him.

Now just sit back and think about this for a moment. A woman whom they all enjoyed snickering about and pointing at behind her back was suddenly the one who brought them to salvation. Hmm.

- How is it that God revealed in Jesus Christ seems to know us so well?

I think Jesus answered the questions by the love he demonstrated for this one woman and her entire village. Again, Jesus should not have stopped in a Samaritan town, let alone talk to a Samaritan woman, especially one with her history, but he did. Among the many objectives that are attributed to the Messiah was that the Messiah would set the prisoner free. Jesus saw in this woman, someone who was imprisoned by her shame and guilt, and set her free!

She had been wrong about love at least five times before. In him, she got a glimpse of what God's love for her was all about.

I can't speak for all of you, but I can relate to this story because I have messed up a lot in my life. And if it wasn't for the love, grace, and mercy revealed through Jesus Christ I too would be paralyzed by shame and guilt. But that is not who God is, and we know that because we know Jesus.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Well, throughout the 2020 Lenten series "Journey with Jesus through John" we will hear stories about Jesus in which he asks nothing of us. And in today's Gospel Reading he didn't teach a particular lesson. There is no "go and do likewise." It seems like all we can do is observe it.

But that doesn't mean there is nothing for us to do. Now in our third week of Lent, I hope that you have had plenty of opportunities to reflect on your own life and maybe that has uncovered some old sin, and shame, and guilt. You should confess those things before God, and hear his words of forgiveness. That is the reason I included a page in my little model of devotion just for the assurance of God's forgiveness.

But then there are three more steps you need to take:

First step: Forget it. That's right. Forget it. That which you think is the biggest dang sin a person could have ever committed, once confessed, is forgiven.

Second Step: Now forgive yourself. I know this is difficult. We allow it to exist in the dark corners of our minds, and it lays there like coronavirus, waiting to attack us when we let our defenses down. Don't let that happen. It is a thing you did, not a thing that you are. It does not define you. Forgive yourself.

And the Third Step: Get rid of your shame and guilt. And don't let anyone pick it back up for you and give it back to you. It isn't yours any longer. God has forgiven you, Jesus took it to the cross, and it's no longer yours. Amen? Amen!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, when we take a good look at ourselves we see fragile beings. Human life is hard. We get banged up along the way, most of the time because of the mistakes we make. But you offer forgiveness and new life. You are the living water. Encourage us to drink you in and refresh our weary and worn out souls. We pray this in your name. Amen