

Lent 3 – 07/03/2020

John 4:5-42 – The Samaritan women at the well

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

She has a history. Things done and left undone – some good, some not so good. Guilt and regrets. Fears. Wounds and sorrows. Secrets too. She is a woman with a past.

Reading the history of this text, the vast number of commentaries and interpretations, most if not all will tell us this woman's past is generally seen as one of promiscuity. The evidence? Five spouses and now living unmarried with a sixth man. Looked at but not seen. Labeled yet nameless. She remains unknown to everyone. Everyone that is, except Jesus.

But the fact is we don't know the details of this woman's past.

So let's not be too quick to judge. Maybe we don't need to know the details for a reason. Maybe it is enough that she mirrors for us our own lives. We too are people with a past, people with a history. We are all Samaritan women.

People like her, people like us, people with a past, often live in fear of being found out. It is not just the fear that another will know the truth about us but, that they will do so without ever really seeing us and without ever really knowing us. We all thirst to be seen and to be known at a deep and intimate level. We all want and need to pour our lives out to one who knows us, to let them drink from the depths of our very being. That is exactly what Jesus is asking of this woman with a past when he says "Give me a drink." It is an invitation to let herself be known.

To be known is to be loved and to be loved is to be known.

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To be found out, however, without being known leaves us dry and desolate. It leaves us to live a dehydrated life thirsting for something more, something different, but we end up always returning to the same old wells.

We all go down to some well, it becomes habit. For some, like the Samaritan women, it is the relationship well. For others it is the well of perfectionism. Some go to the well of hiding and isolation. Others draw from the wells of power and control. Too many drink from the wells of addiction. Many live at the well of busyness and denial. Today, many will drink from the wells of fake news and panic.

We could each name the well from which we drink. Day after day, month after month, year after year. We arrive hoping our thirst will be quenched. We leave as thirsty as when we arrived only to return the next day. For too long we have drunk from the well that never satisfies, the well that can never satisfy.

There is another well, however. It is the well of Jesus Christ. This is the well from which new life and new possibilities spring forth. It is the well that frees us from the patterns and habits that keep us living as thirsty people.

This is the well that the Samaritan women in today's gospel found. She intended to go to same old well she had gone to for years, the well that her ancestors and their flocks drank from. Today is different. Jesus holds before her two realities of her life; the reality of what is and the reality of what might be. He brings her past to the light of the noon-day. He says it, not as a statement of condemnation but simply of statement of what is. He tells her everything she has ever done. She has been found out.

But it doesn't end there. Jesus is more interested in her future than her past. He wants to satisfy her thirst more than judge her history. Jesus knows her. He looks beyond her past and sees a women dying of thirst; a women thirsting to be loved, to be seen, to be accepted, to be included, to be forgiven, to be known. Her thirst will never be quenched by the external wells of life. Nor will ours. For Jesus says so.

"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."

It became in the Samaritan woman "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." She discovered within herself the interior well and left her water jar behind. She has become the well in which Christ's life flows.

It is not enough, however, to hear her story or even believe her testimony. Until we come to the well of Christ's life within us we will continue returning to the dry wells of our life. We will continue to live thirsty. We will continue to live in fear of being found out.

So I wonder, from what wells do you drink? How much longer will you carry your water jars? For there is another well, one that promises life, one by which we are known and loved. Come to a new well. Come to the well of Christ's life, Christ's love, Christ's presence that is already in you. Come to the well that is Christ himself and then drink deeply.

Drink deeply until you yourself become a vessel of the one you have drunk.

Amen.