

Second Sunday in Lent

March 8, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

John 4:5-26 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.[a])

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

17 "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. **18** The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. **20** Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. **22** You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **24** God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

"Outsiders, Outcasts, and Eternal Refreshment"

It started simply enough. Jesus just asked for a drink. He was tired. He was thirsty. He went to the right spot and asked someone familiar with the area, someone who had operated the well plenty of times, to give him a drink. But this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we never get her name, is about much more than hydration. Jesus goes

out of his way to engage the outsider and outcast. In the end, Jesus is offering more than mere refreshment. Jesus give the ultimate gift to quench the longings of a soul.

We first need to realize how unconventional this approach by Jesus was. Jesus grew up and began his ministry in Galilee, which is in the northern part of Israel. Jerusalem was in the southern third of the territory. In between lay the area known as Samaria. When the Israelites were led off into exile in Babylon, the conquering powers didn't just leave a population vacuum. They replaced the conquered Israelites with people from five or more different nations that had been conquered in a different part of the empire. Those people intermarried with some of the Israelites who were left behind. Their religion became a mixture of their own homegrown beliefs and elements of worship of the God of the Bible. So the Israelites considered them half-breed both ethically and religiously. Many Jews when traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem bypassed Samaria completely, taking a much longer route to avoid any contamination from these despised people.

This hostility was shared the other way too. We see it in the initial response of the woman: **"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"** (John 4:9) It comes out later when the rivalry over the right location and correct way to worship is thrown at Jesus. We even have an explanation how this conversation took place when John gives us the parenthetical remark about the disciples going away to buy food (John 4:8) and how surprised they were to see him chatting with this woman when they returned (John 4:27) So our first takeaway is to see that Jesus engages with someone his own people consider an outsider.

No doubt every one of us here has felt like an outsider at some time. You don't have much of a social media following. Or you don't even have a smart phone. Your credit score is trash and you can't get a loan. You walk into a store and you're the only one with your skin color. You're in a crowded stadium cheering for the wrong team. Or you roll your eyes when some celebrity thinks they're being brave by weighing in on an important issue. And yet there is a time when you're ok with it. A time when you grow out of the need to wear the trendy clothes, because you start to think teenagers look ridiculous.

Jesus makes this Samaritan woman feel ok to be an outsider. He Jesus has an offer for her. Jesus offers living water. She immediately jumps at his offer. She's thinking of how improved her life would be without the extra work, the repeated trips, the tedious trudging out the well. Never thirsting again sounds pretty good. So often, we are like that Samaritan woman. We are looking for something to quench our thirst. We want Jesus to give us those things more important than a big social media following. We want real people to really value us. We want something more than the thrill of getting a new gadget. We want real respect. We want to feel more than comfortable around different races and ethnicities. We want to be treated as equals. So many of thing we are after are real thirsts. But getting what we're after won't really satisfy us. At least not in any ultimate sense. And the things we are after aren't really the primary reason why Jesus engages with any of us.

You can feel proud of being an outsider when you've gotten over the importance of everyone accepting you. But it's an entirely different thing to be an outcast. That is part of

the fear driving the concern about the Corona Virus. We all know how easy it is to catch something unpleasant. Maybe it's not your fault. Maybe you didn't do anything wrong. But you still feel ashamed if it happens to you. You still feel isolated when no one wants to be around you. Jesus invites the woman into a friendly conversation. But then Jesus pushes just the right buttons to make her uncomfortable. Jesus smashes the taboo of his people just by associating with a Samaritan woman, but then goes right for a sore subject with this woman. All he has to say is: **"Go, call your husband and come back."** (John 4:16) Jesus doesn't pretend this outcast woman has no problems. He actually recognizes the elephant in the room. He simply wants her to see her deeper need. Her spiritual need. Her soul's thirst that has gone unfulfilled. Until now.

Real shame doesn't come from contracting a nasty disease. Real isolation doesn't come when you realize you aren't important on social media or don't have the right phone or don't wear the right clothes. Shame comes from the kind of things we aren't willing to discuss even with trusted friends. Isolation is what we live out when we bury those painful mistakes deep inside and are afraid to even bring them up. Shame is realizing I'm no better than the woman at the well with Jesus. Sinners who have only had one husband, still need living water. Those happily unmarried still need what only Jesus gives. Those married to work or lifestyle choices need the refreshment that lasts longer than a work week or vacation. Those divorced from reality and pretending they are fine all on their own, those estranged from any standard of right or wrong beside what their voice inside their head says. We all need refreshment from Jesus. Those trapped in unhealthy relationships with alcohol or painkillers. Those stuck in an unhappy commitment of bailing out family members after repeated poor choices. Those clinging in hope to a fading romance with friends who constantly let you down. We all need the flowing, life-giving water from Jesus.

To you and me and to everyone who thirsts, Jesus says: **"but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** (John 4:14) Jesus knows exactly what you need. It's not acceptance that allows you to go on in your sin. It's not brushing aside whatever is causing you shame. It's the refreshment that Jesus comes to you in your darkest moment in your deepest dread. Jesus comes to take your shame on himself. The sinless Son of God takes whatever would cause you to be cast away from God and takes it to the cross. Jesus is isolated there at his crucifixion. Abandoned. Forsaken. Quarantined because of the contamination dumped onto him for every sin of every sinner in history.

Residents of New York City consume water. Lots of it. To replace water tunnels built in 1917 and 1936, a new project was authorized that would be the largest non-defense construction project in the history of Western Civilization. Or at least it was when it was first authorized in 1954. Construction began in 1970 and is expected to be completed in 2020. The tunnel will be more than 60 miles long, travel 500 feet below street level and cost over \$6 billion. When completed, New York City Water Tunnel No. 3 will help deliver the 2 billion gallons of water New Yorker consumers each day.

Jesus didn't blast through bedrock or drill beneath busy city streets. But Jesus was willing to break societal taboos to reach this one soul beside the well. Jesus was willing to embrace

one outcast to let her see even she had a Savior. Jesus was worn out and weary when he sat down at the well. But he goes out of his way for this one outcast outsider soul. Jesus goes way beyond any reasonable expectation to show she was worth it. He had to deliver his gifts of forgiveness and salvation whatever the costs.

Giving over the gifts to one soul meant taking the time to be with an outsider and then engage with an outcast on a deeper spiritual level. Even then, when deeper spiritual issues came up, Jesus didn't allow himself to get sidetracked or drawn into unnecessary arguments. And now Jesus takes another unconventional approach for reaching people with his gifts today. Jesus uses outsiders and outcasts to share his living water. Did you know that today, "there are nearly as many Lutherans in Ethiopia as there are in the U.S? There are now more Baptists in (an eastern state in India) than there are in the southern states of the U.S. There were more Christians worshipping in China last Sunday than there were here in the U.S. or in all of Europe!" (Finke, Greg) That means mission work isn't primarily about what is done in some far off country where the people have a different language and strange customs. We miss out on missionary opportunities because "most churches and church-goers continue to think and operate as if the U.S. culture is still essentially church and looking for a church home." (Finke, Greg) But Jesus is at work in our communities and our neighborhoods. Jesus is up to something right here: "Joining Jesus' mission is not about changing what we do when we go to church on Sunday mornings. It is about changing what we do when we go out as Church into our neighborhoods, workplaces and schools on Monday mornings." (Finke, Greg) And if we are going to be missionaries in our "Neighborhood," then it "is all about the relationships, or the potential relationships, we could have with just a little intentionality." (Finke, Greg)

There is something very refreshing about the way Jesus engaged with the woman at the well. It wasn't about getting into an argument where he could prove her wrong and thump his chest about being right. While our culture may not be as Christian as it once was and we can't assume someone is just waiting to find a new church, what Christianity has to offer is very refreshing to people in our world today. "For instance: People take note when someone is willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. People appreciate the opportunity to sort through their spiritual questions honestly without manipulation. People are intrigued by someone who exhibits both grace and wisdom. People are looking for those who exhibit authentic love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and self-control. They wish to discover what is true. They long for authentic community with people they can trust." (Greg Finke) You might not consider yourself a missionary. You might not have any kind of formal training in evangelism. But because you have the gift of Jesus' living water, you are perfectly equipped to bring worship in Spirit and Truth to someone in your neighborhood. And without going into lengthy theological speeches or cueing up a prepared evangelism presentation, you can just be there for people who are outsiders when it comes to God's kingdom. You can do it simply by taking a refreshing approach of genuinely caring about someone and being concerned about their spiritual welfare.

Whoever you are and however you see yourself, Jesus has given you new life. Jesus has come to you with the life-giving waters of his good news. Jesus has given you a new identity that is neither Jew nor Samaritan, but claims you as a child of God. And as we focus more

and more on the words of Jesus, that living water wells up in us and flows from us to others. We are refreshed and guided by the Holy Spirit. We are strengthened in faith and empowered for the mission Jesus gave us. So that outsiders and outcasts may all share in the eternal refreshment of Jesus. Amen.