

Ex 17:1-7; Ps 95; Ro 5:1-11; Jn 4:3-42

03-19-17 Third Sunday in Lent

True Worshipers and the Water of Life

Jesus can be both rough and gentle. Think back to John chapter 3 last week. Jesus chided old Nicodemus for being God's servant – and yet understanding so little of the ways of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisee got a dose of tough love that night. That was his path to faith in Messiah.

But, here in the 4th chapter, Jesus shows great patience and tenderness for a person of very low reputation. He even pushes the limits of proper behavior for a man, especially a rabbi. Jesus crosses all barriers to have this conversation. Let's camp on the comparison between this woman at the well and the old Pharisee for a bit. Nicodemus – educated, privileged, probably wealthy, of high standing in the community. He came to Jesus in the dark, to avoid controversy.

Here is the woman at the well: Shady past, no standing in her community (She comes to the well at noon, when the neighbor women are indoors out of the heat.) Religiously edgy – because the Samaritan religion is a hybrid of

other faiths, with a dash of Judaism. That is the Torah. She has felt the contempt of Jews and pagans alike. She is an outsider. Today it is Jesus who is thirsty after walking through Samaria. He asks her, the woman at the well, for a drink of water. Any other Jew would consider her water jar unclean – not fit to drink from. So begins a humorous play upon the theme of literal water and the Water of Life – not physical, but spiritual refreshment.

The nameless woman at the well of Sychar doesn't get it. At first. In this, she is like Nicodemus. Both are fixed upon Moses, the Law giver. Those who think this way are looking for a continuous Old Covenant – hoping that the Law will reshape them – and perfect minds and hearts. Most of all, taking Jesus' words literally.

But, she is the one with the water jar. She can let the jar down into the well and give Jesus a drink. Parched as He is, Jesus invites her to ask for the water He gives – not just one long, cool drink of H₂O – but the opening of a spring of eternal life within her. Living water. The Water of Life.

In the societies of Jews on one side, and Samaritans on the other – there was no common ground. Contempt and insults had been exchanged for centuries. Yet, Jesus chose to walk through Samaria. Most of His countrymen would skirt Samaria by crossing the Jordan River and making a wide detour of that area to get to Galilee from Jerusalem in Judea. It was for this very encounter and for the mission to Sychar that the Lord chose this road. He is making an Exodus through a dry and barren place – to this well, this woman and her town. What places do you avoid, because you don't want to associate with "them?" Who are "they?"

As this woman sees who Jesus is – that He is at least a prophet – and then, more than a prophet – hope and joy begin to rise up in her. Henri Nouwen said, "Spiritual identity means we are not what we do or what people say about us. And we are not what we have. We are the beloved daughters and sons of God."

The Apostle Paul reminds us, "While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people...God shows His love for us,

because while we were still sinners Christ died for us. (Ro 5:6, 8) Jesus is the Rock from whom Living Water flows.

Perhaps because the truth is dawning upon her, or perhaps because she doesn't wish to hear more of Jesus' supernatural insight into her life, the woman at the well brings up a theological point of controversy between Samaritans and Hebrews: Where is it proper to worship God?

Jesus prophesies about the future of true worship of the true God. No charge for this amazing insight. We cannot prove that the woman understood His words – by then, the disciples had returned with food. They are shocked and amazed by the improper situation at the well. The Lord is out of bounds – it looks bad for Him. But, they say nothing about it. They trust Jesus. Did they hear the proclamation that He is Messiah? Did they hear that, in truth, neither on Mt. Gerizim nor on Mt. Zion will true worshipers bow down to the Creator God.

On this side of the cross of crucifixion – we can see and understand what Jesus is saying. This is

the truth of the end-time – the revealing of the kingdom of God. It is in Jesus Christ – who fulfills the Law – who fulfills the Prophets – who perfects the Exodus – and makes a way where there is no way – it is in Him that we worship God in spirit and in truth. He replaces the temple – He replaces the sun and the moon – He is Messiah – the Source of Living Water – the Savior of the woman at the well – and many in her town – the Savior of the world and the whole universe.

I believe the woman who came to the well at noon was in turmoil – anxious – very unsure and insecure in life. So was Nicodemus. They're like you and me. Who knows what is coming next in our journey, our Exodus? How easy it is to plunge into worry and confusion!

Here's the bottom line: "For because of our faith, he has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand (grace), step out confidently and joyfully! Look forward to actually becoming all that God has had in mind for you to be.

Rejoice, too, when you run into problems and trials – they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character, so we trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. *(We can confess our wrongs – seek God’s forgiveness – and be washed. my add’n.)*

When that happens, hold your head high in your troubles and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this love within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love.” (Ro 5:2-5 TLB paraphrased)

I pray we all become true worshipers – wherever we are, whatever we are doing. I pray you won’t be able to find enough containers – jars and buckets – to hold all the grace God is pouring out. So that we – the body of Christ – will splash and scatter that grace all over this town, and countryside and region until Jesus returns in glory. Amen.