

Lent 3, March 12, 2023-John 4.5-42

Introducing the themes for the Day-

We might remember Jesus' words about God so loving the world when we overhear what turns out to be the longest conversation Jesus has with anybody in the Gospels. The big question in front of us for the coming weeks is "How far is God willing to go to love the world back into wholeness?"

5So he 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 laboured, 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

We might tell our dearest ones that we love them “to the moon and back”. We mean it. We live it. Right? So just how far does Jesus carry God’s love for the world?

How about Samaria? Big deal, you say. It is. The set up to today’s reading, Jesus says it’s necessary to go to Samaria en route home. Map wise it’s not necessary. Samaria is the long way around!

Here’s a not fun, rather painful and important fact. Some 120 years before Jesus, the high priest of Judea who was also the head of the nation invaded Samaria, laying siege to the capital city and also destroying the Temple on Mount Gerazim, a sacred site.

So, IS it necessary for Jesus to take the long route through hostile territory? He says YES. Jesus knows the Samaritans are just the sort of people he was talking about in the beatitudes... people stigmatized, oppressed and denied justice.

Who can blame the woman at Jacob’s well when she asks Jesus what he’s doing there and just who does he think he is anyway mooching water and expecting her to draw it...Good on her to notice he didn’t have his own bucket.

We need to talk about this woman a minute before we consider her questions. Modern preachers and teachers do this woman a huge dis-service by depicting her as some sort of run-around-Sue, or some soap opera character having a lover of the week.

Yep, five husbands. No getting around that. Remember divorce laws back in the day...the laws Jesus said coddled men and exploited women?

Commentators say it's likely this woman had been widowed and/or dumped onto the street several times in her life. Widows and those expelled by divorce couldn't return to the family they grew up in...most ended up on the streets relying on the kindness of almsgivers.

Earlier this week we observed International Woman's Day. In that spirit, I say let's regard this woman's true humanity with its real struggles instead of trotting out some caricature.

This Samaritan woman despite her difficulty displays plenty of moxie when she asks her questions. It was eye opening to hear how Dr. Karoline Lewis in the Working Preacher podcast diagrams how the Samaritan woman's view of Jesus progresses as they talk together...from ill mannered Galilean to potential ally to a prophet to the messiah....

Now another important fact: For all the times Jesus shied away from declaring himself messiah he tells this woman straight up that's exactly who he is. The conversation leads finally to Jesus using words he'd use many times later...."I AM".

You might remember your Bible stories where people would encounter the divine and when pressed for a name, the Lord would say "I AM", or I will be...This woman with the complicated life stands face to face with the embodiment of God's presence.

It might be that the biggest question the woman at the well carries within her is "where do I belong?" "to whom do I belong?"

As she and Jesus spar a little and as she navigates through her confusion and double meanings, Jesus has been with her showing her that yes, she does belong...she belongs and is beloved. When that sinks in, there's no stopping this remarkable person from becoming one of Jesus' first and most eloquent missionaries. Her life changes. Life changes for her people

too. Jesus who represents outsiders who shouldn't be trusted reveals himself as the very one who will bring healing and wholeness...These Samaritans will learn first hand that when God so loves the world, that means them. God sees them. God knows them. God loves them.

Jesus' detour through Samaria gives us a foretaste of the lengths God would go in so loving the world. As holy week approaches we recall there's no place Jesus or even God would not go. Amen.