

Grace Greater than Our Sins

Text: Exodus 17:1-7

Romans 5:1-11 (Series A. 3rd Sunday in Lent) Ps. 95

John 4:5-42

Jesus answered, "Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life." "Sir," the woman said, "give me that water!"

Let us pray:

The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The nun made a note, and posted on the apple tray: "Take only ONE. God is watching." Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A child had written a note, "Take all you want - God is watching the apples.

There is something very biblical in the statement that *non-judgmental love, unconditional love* reduces tension. Our story in the Gospel a Samaritan woman had come to a well in the heat of the day. She had come alone. She had been married 5 times, and 5 times she had been shown the door by her husband.

Remember that in the culture of the time, it was the husband who divorced his wife – the wife had no say in the matter. Now she was living with a fellow who wouldn't even marry her. I could easily imagine that her self-esteem was at an all time low. She had failed 5 times in marriage.

She may have thought that there must be something seriously wrong with her that 5 different men have seen it fit to divorce her. She is with another man now. She dare not marry him but she needed a man because a woman had so few rights in her day.

Without a man, she would be out in the cold and be forced beg in order to survive. As often as it happens, I can imagine the gossiping and snickering of the local women would not have helped her self-image at all. None of the other women would associate with her. They simply looked the other way if they met her in the market place.

Perhaps that's the reason she didn't come to the well first thing in the morning when the other women did. She wanted to be alone. She didn't want to be hurt any further. When she came to the well, there was a Jewish rabbi sitting there. *Holy Moses.....*, he was the last person she wanted to see.

The Jews looked down their noses at the Samaritans – they were considered half-breeds and heathen. Back in history, the Jews in the north had intermarried with the Persians and had mixed a lot of the Persian religion with their own.

Ancient Jews were quick to put down and criticize the Samaritans. When she saw the Jewish rabbi I would suppose that she intended to fill her jug and get away from there as quickly as possible, hopefully before he could say anything nasty to her.

Jesus is the first to speak. He asks, "Could you please give me a cup of water?" She couldn't believe her ears. She was a woman. He was a man. Traditional Jewish men never spoke to strange women in public, even today.

He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. Jews never drank or ate from anything a Samaritan had touched. She was a failure morally and spiritually, a sinner. He was a holy man who spoke kindly and pleasantly.

He goes on to talk about "life-giving water". *"Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life" (John 4:13,14).*

Here this woman was considered a failure by herself and others – a failure in marriage, rejected by others, immoral, spiritually inferior, and a woman – and Jesus knows all about her and what is happening in her life, but he accepts her as a person of worth.

He not only talks with her but also offers her water that is "*life-giving water*" - water that gives eternal life. Not only is the woman surprised but so were his disciples. In fact, you might say they were shocked. Jesus was breaking every rule in the book. But Jesus didn't care about the rules.

All he was concerned about was this woman who was carrying a heavy load – a load of failure that was weighing her down. All he was concerned about was that she needed to hear the good news of God's love, forgiveness and eternal life.

Jesus is teaching his disciples that even Samaritans can be saved and if Samaritans can be saved so can Romans, Greeks, tax collectors, prostitutes, thieves and all those we wouldn't normally associate with because of their way of life.

If Jesus is able to reach out to a woman like this, he will also reach out to sinners of every kind – including you and me. Jesus accepts sinful, shame-filled separated people. In fact, Jesus has gone out of his way, into enemy territory, to meet the woman at Jacob's well and to give her as an undeserved and unasked for gift, the good news of eternal life.

The gospel writer, John, has told us this story to give us another glimpse at what kind of person the Messiah is. God accepts sinful, shame-filled, separated people. Let me take a moment and say something.

If our problem is the Economy. God would have sent the best economist to solve our unemployment, and financial problems, if it were health God would have sent the best doctor to heal our ailing bodies, if the environment, God would have sent an expert to fix the pollution and the mess we have created on this planet.

But the problem isn't the stuff that I have just mentioned. Our problem is sin problem, a heart problem and that is why God sent a Saviour. God sends his Son into an enemy territory, into the sinful and separated world, so that we could receive forgiveness and eternal life through the work of the Cross, even though we don't deserve it or have asked for it.

From this one conversation with one woman, a whole village is exposed to the truth. This story of Jesus and the woman at the well has many facets to it. The more we look at it, the more we see different themes emerging. But today let's stick with the idea that *Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.*

Jesus knew all about her history – and yet he treats her as if she were an equal, as if she was a person worthy of respect, worthy of affection.

- ❖ When our guilt for the wrongs have weighed us down,
- ❖ when we make choices that turn out to be all wrong,
- ❖ when we feel lonely, sick and tired of the way things are turning out in our lives,
- ❖ when we are depressed and upset with ourselves and we can't see anything good in ourselves,
- ❖ when we feel as if our faith is at rock bottom and feel as if church and religion are not doing anything for us,

When we have so many good intentions to be different, to take our involvement in the church more seriously, to pray more, but go no further, isn't it great to read a story like this one about Jesus and his love and acceptance of the woman at the well?.

We may not have anyone to turn to in this world, but rest assured that Jesus is there to warmly accept us and help us to see that he will give us the strength and the power we need to overcome whatever it is that is grieving us.

The good news is that God takes the first step, initiates conversation. He comes to us so that we might come to him. *Be Still and Know that I am God (Illustration with the baptismal certificate). Always remember the covenant God made with you, 'I will be your God, and you will be my son or daughter (people).'*

Lent is a moment to think about our dry moments in life. Is God in Jesus my Living Water for consolation, hope, compassion, and love of my neighbor as myself, or just the One I blame and complain to? Jesus told the Samaritan woman that *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*

This is a Well that runs deep. How deeply are we each searching to drink up this *living water*, the spirit and truth of God, the Creator of *all* life in its multitude of shapes, forms, cultures, colors, genders, and faiths.

How often do we say grace yet hate the neighbors – you know, the ones who holds opposite political views, attend a different church, mosque, temple, synagogue, or none at all?

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman *first before all others* that he is the Messiah. She believes him. Do we? Time for us each to dig deep. Our love of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is only as deep as our spiritual wells. Is my Well deep enough?

When we encounter people who are different in some way, this story should remind us not to be so quick to judge, rather quick to reach out to others with the love of God. *Be Still and Know that I am God. "Drink this living water,"* Jesus says, *"And you will never be thirsty again."* **Amen.**