

3 Lent  
New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown OH  
John 4:5-42

March 15, 2020  
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The Gospel reading this morning is a most interesting story. It contains several significant encounters, all with Jesus, and all of them life-changing. In these 37 verses, we experience a whole range of responses to Jesus, including our own. It is full of surprises.

First, a recap. This is not a parable about Samaritans, like the story of the good Samaritan. No, this is Jesus encountering real Samaritans. Jews and Samaritans generally did not mix, but there was a geographical problem in traveling across the middle of Israel – namely, Jews had to go through Samaria if they took a direct route. That is why Jesus is here, in Samaria. Here he is, hot and tired, and he stops at noontime at a well. There he encounters a woman who is drawing water.

Not only do Jews and Samaritans not speak, but men and women who don't know each other don't speak either. And here ensues a fascinating conversation, breaking both taboos. Jesus and the woman banter back and forth, talking local politics and religion, Jesus speaking in metaphors about water with richer meaning, the woman misunderstanding him, perhaps on purpose.

In the midst of this bantering, Jesus tells the woman that he is the Messiah. Whoa! In the other three Gospel accounts, Jesus is really secretive about his role – he tells the disciples not to tell anyone. And here he is telling a complete stranger, a Samaritan and a woman no less!

And just then the disciples come back – they've been off grocery shopping. Jesus has just revealed himself as the Messiah, and they say, "Wow, you're talking with a woman!" At this point, the woman leaves and begins evangelizing in the village – we'll follow that later. Back to the disciples, who have returned with food, and try to get Jesus to eat something. Jesus starts talking in metaphors again, this time about food: "My food is to do the will of God." Then Jesus talks about the harvest – another big metaphor. He says, "Look around you: harvest time is here." We don't know if the disciples figured that one out or not (often they are clueless), but clearly the Samaritans got it – the harvest is the harvest of the faithful, the ingathering of those who believe. The woman took off toward the village and told everyone that she had met the Messiah, and she was very persuasive. The Samaritans came out to see Jesus, invited him to stay with them, which he did for two days. In the end, they were convinced by their own experience that Jesus was the Savior of the world.

How cool is that. Here we are, in the fourth chapter of the fourth Gospel, the crucifixion nowhere in sight,(it will come fifteen chapters later), and all these Samaritans know that Jesus is the Messiah and the Savior of the world. Wow. They figured it out: saving the world is really about significance and depth of life right now, not later.

So what does this mean to you and to me? Suppose you have an unexpected encounter. And this meeting, with another person, helps you to look inside yourself, to re-examine your life. Perhaps you find out that your life, up to this point, has been a bit dry – that you are actually parched, dry and thirsty, spiritually dehydrated. There hasn't been much meaning in your daily activities – whether the runaround of chores like drawing water from the village water well, or running kids to their activities, or running around shopping, whatever – that the runaround was feeling like... just a runaround. And BAM – here you meet someone who suggests that you look at all that meaningless activity. You can keep running around, or you can investigate something that offers more depth – Jesus called it Living Water. For you, it might mean devoting more time to reading, meditating, praying – Lent is a great season to try that out. It might mean paying attention to the needs of the world, including needs right outside our doors. It might mean sorting through your stuff and giving your excess to Goodwill or the Salvation Army, to help someone less fortunate. There are lots of ways to experience Living Water.

And you might be encouraged to share your experience – perhaps you will be the meaningful encounter for someone else. The Samaritan woman was – she took her experience of Jesus and she ran with it. She impacted an entire village. You can impact all kinds of folks, if you just have the courage to talk. You can say to a battered woman, “You know, you don't have to live this way.” You can say to a depressed friend, “I see and hear your emptiness.” You can say to anyone, “Come to church and meet Jesus” – well, if that's too strong, say, “Come to church and see what happens!” We are in an extraordinary time right now. Each year Lent brings us wonderful opportunities for welcoming the hungry, the spiritually thirsty, those seeking nourishment in all forms. We have a banquet here – rich offerings of community. The harvest is especially rich right now – there are folks out there who are clueless about Easter. They think it is about chocolate bunnies. Here's a chance to show someone that our salvation story is much more than that. The Samaritans recognized that Jesus was Savior of the World. Do you know that, in your own life? Can you tell someone else?

In this time of concern about the coronavirus, coming to the physical church building may not be possible, but we can still show our concern, with prayers and phone calls. Keep the communication line open, to God and to our neighbors.