

NL WOMAN AT THE WELL
SUNDAY, JULY 14/15, 2018

FIRST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

(Psalm 42:1-5; John 4:1-42)
Living Water

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

As I mentioned in the announcements, I'm going to start my sermon by looking at the *end* of our Gospel story...

I actually went through a time in my younger adult life when I had no patience for sad, tragic or shocking endings. That was before the days of internet, Wikipedia and easily accessed spoiler alerts, so I had to figure out the story's ending the old fashioned way:

I'd pick a book...read the first chapter, then read the last, and if I didn't like how it ended, I wouldn't read it... **Was that just me or have some of you done that too?** I see a few heads nodding...

So...jumping to the end of our gospel story...we discover that the woman at the well manages to bring most of her whole town into Jesus' circle of faith.



Having done so, though, the townspeople eventually turn to her and say, *It is no longer because of what **you** said that we believe, for we have heard for **ourselves** and **know** that this is truly the **Savior** of the world!*

It is me or does that sound just a little...snotty, a little dismissive, a little rude...**anyone agree?** I mean, again we don't have the intonation or the **facial** expressions to see what non-verbal clues are being displayed as the people speak.

However, what they **say** seems a *far cry* from what **I** think they **should** have said, like, I don't know... *Thank you for bringing us to meet the savior of the world!!*

So here's the question at the end of the story: **What do you think she said back to them???**

Hold on to that thought – we'll come back to it in a bit...

I love this encounter between Jesus and this *woman in Samaria*. At heart, it's a beautiful human interest story where Jesus and this nameless woman establish an incredible connection. But along with that, and specifically because of her, this is also the very first community of people in the Bible to embrace Jesus as the Messiah, God's Chosen, the Christ – and they are most definitely NOT part of the traditional ***Chosen People package...!!***

Let's go back through the introduction: the Lord is tired from travelling, and takes a seat next to a well in the heat of the day. A local woman comes to draw water and he asks her for a drink. Hospitality in the desert – no big deal, right? Everything's cool...or is it?

In fact, we learn very quickly that in this simple-seeming scene, Jesus has just jumped with both feet on some tightly scripted taboos...

Here's the first clue: In verse 4, the author tells us that *Jesus had to go through Samaria*. That's an interesting choice of words, isn't? The Lord *had to go through Samaria...?*

In fact, a good Jewish person in those days had to NOT go through Samaria, would walk miles out of the way to AVOID going into Samaria, would not be caught dead setting one foot in that forsaken frontier called SAMARIA.

So right out of the gate, we wonder: **Why** did Jesus **have to go through Samaria???**

Well, let's start with who these Samaritans are...and why they're so hated by the Jews...

Centuries before, there had been a split in the kingdom, much like **our** country in the Civil War – except their breakup was **permanent**. Eventually the northern kingdom was defeated in battle by a country called Assyria. The Assyrians would then keep peace in such conquered areas by bringing in people from other

countries, forcing them to intermarry and even mixed together their **religions**. The **internal** effect was to ruin any united power base the locals might have hoped to hold on to.

The **external** effect was to create a huge rift between the people of Samaria in the north, and their Jewish cousins in the south.

The Jews felt that they were far and away superior – because they had remained religiously, morally and racially “pure” to their religion as it was organized under King David. The Samaritans who remained faithful, however, drew their inspiration from the parts of the bible that preceded David – and there you have it: loathsome Samaritans in the north and intolerant Jews in the south...



So there stands here a few significant barriers between Jesus and this woman as he sits to rest his weary bones and asks her for a drink. The woman knows her stuff. In verse 9 we're told that she *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.)*

What are the two barriers she identifies?

1. Gender: Male vs. Female
2. Nationality: Jew vs. Samaritan

Yet in spite of the fact that they should have had nothing to do with each other, these two end up engaged in a beautiful discussion about water and thirst, both physical and spiritual.

You wonder if she gets what he means when in v. 14 he says, *The water that I will give will become...a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.*

Her plea at the end of this section seems almost more a cry from her soul than from her parched lips...*Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water...*

Then in the next section we find two more barriers that arise when the two talk about the woman's pain-filled past, and what God is looking for in the hearts of those who worship the Lord.

The two **other** walls that stand between them are

3. Respectability: Man of God vs. Woman's painful past
4. Spirituality Jew (pure) vs. Samaritan (corrupted)

So not only is Jesus' conversation partner a **woman** who lives in **Samaria**, and as such she worships in a manner that Jews considered **corrupt, plus** she's a woman with a very **painful past**. She offers no explanation for her string of 5+ husbands... nor, interestingly enough, is there any condemnation from the Lord for her life choices.

In fact – his intimate knowledge of her life, far from shutting her down in shame, actually seems to open up that spiritual thirst he'd tapped into earlier. They share a little verbal sparring about who has the better vision of the truth about God – Jews or Samaritans.

But then the woman makes a startling confession: *I know that the Messiah is coming!* This **woman** from **Samaria**, whose **religion is corrupted**, and whose **life** has been something of a **train wreck** – **she** is living with the sure and certain hope that one day, the Messiah will come – and will make life better for all people.

Can't you just picture the smile on Jesus' face?? I'm sure he was tempted to stand up on the spot and say, *My work is done here!?!?* I mean, isn't that kind of God's goal for the entire world???

But then Jesus makes his **own** startling confession: *I am – Yahweh – I am he, the one who is speaking to you.* The **Son of God reveals himself** – his **true identity** – for the very first time, to a woman, who is a Samaritan, with a corrupted religion and troubled past... **WHY HER? WHY HERE?**



Just then, we're told, the disciples return to the well from their trip to the grocery store... And...they cannot believe what their eyes are beholding. They are dumbfounded – they have NO CLUE what to make of the situation: Jesus and the Samaritan woman, sitting together, sharing a drink of water, and an amazing conversation...

Remember those four walls we identified that should have kept the two apart? The disciples do:

1. Gender: Male vs. Female
2. Nationality: Jew vs. Samaritan
3. Respectability: Man of God vs. Woman's painful past
4. Spirituality Jew (pure) vs. Samaritan (corrupted)

And it turns out there might be one other issue setting off alarms in the disciples' pea-brains at this very moment. Some of the most famous *love stories* in the Old Testament start with a chance meeting at...a well: Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob & Rachel, Moses & Zipporah – all three couples were brought together because of actions that took place at a well.

I think all these things together explain the strange reaction by the disciples. The story says,

Just 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?" (John 4:27)

But in the wake of that awkward silence, the woman jumps up, leaves her precious water jar on the ground, and runs – all the way back into town, proclaiming, *Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?*

And that brings us to the final chapter, the end of the story, the conclusion that we've already heard. The townspeople, who also have come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, eventually say to the woman,

It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is truly the Savior of the world!

How do you think she responded? What did she say back to them?

Before you answer, there's one possible clue introduced at the very beginning of the story that I confess I have never paid attention to until this week. Verses 4 & 5 of chapter four tell us:

*Jesus had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son, **Joseph**...*

In other words, this interchange between the holy man Jesus and this challenged woman of Samaria, takes place very near where **Joseph** was buried.

Now, I've always just treated that information as if the author's acting like a docent at a museum, offering to the reader an historical anchor...and other possibly interesting, but most likely not very important details.

And yet... *It is*, says one theologian, *something that could very well have been put there by the author to remind us of Joseph's story and his mostly undeserved suffering*. Remember his story?

1. He angers his brothers by predicting that he'll be more powerful than all of them together...So they strip him of his fancy-schmanzy robe, throw him into a pit and then sell him as a slave.
2. He gets hauled down to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, where he actually does a very good job of running the man's home...until, that is, the lady of the house tries to seduce him. When he refuses, she accuses him of trying to attack her, and he gets thrown in prison.
3. Though he hates it, he works hard to the point where he's put in charge of the whole jail. Finally, as you recall, Joseph's ability to interpret dreams allows him to help the King of Egypt prepare for a famine that will last for 7 years. As it happened in Potiphar's house, and in the prison, so now Joseph

is put in charge of the entire country, and helps them set aside enough grain to keep everyone alive through those seven lean years.

4. In the process, he's reunited with his brothers who are forced to come down to Egypt to buy food since the famine covered the whole region.
5. Finally one day Joseph reveals his true identity to them, they have a tearful reunion, and eventually they bring the whole clan down to live in Egypt until the famine passes. When their father finally dies, though, the brothers fear that Joseph will now exact his revenge for the evil they'd done to him. Says the bible:

Then his brothers...fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God?...

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." (Genesis 50:18-21).

Says one theologian: *When no one saw it coming, the sufferings of Joseph turned out to be events leading to the salvation of a people from starvation.*

<https://blog.israelbiblicalstudies.com/jewish-studies/john-4-reconsidering-the-samaritan-woman/>



Her point is that maybe we should consider from that clue about Joseph's plot the beautiful connection between his struggles that led to salvation for others, and this woman's struggles that also led to salvation for others...

So there you have it – now's the time to share: what do you think the woman said to those townspeople? **Anyone want to guess?**

My guess is that she tapped that inner well of water gushing up to eternal life that Jesus gave to her and said to them, ***Thanks be to God!!***

Amen.