

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5- 42

When Jesus comes to the Samaritan woman at the well, she is, perhaps, the most broken woman in the whole Gospel story. The very fact that she comes at noon to draw water, rather than in the early morning, or late evening, when the other women of the village would be there, suggests that, at the very least, she is ashamed. People look down upon her because of her brokenness in marriage and in relationships.

So here she is trying to avoid being seen, and instead there is someone at the well. Not just someone, but a man. Not just a man, but a Jewish man. In that time and place men and women were not to be seen in public together. And Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with one another. So she is startled to see him there. She is even more startled that he speaks to her.

Jesus, we are told, is tired. As he addresses this broken, lonely and ashamed woman, he asks, "Give me a drink". Notice how Jesus does not look down upon her as the others do. He calls no attention to her brokenness. Instead, he acknowledges his own brokenness, His own need. He is tired. He is thirsty.

What Jesus is looking for here is someone who shares his thirst.

His thirst is a thirst for peace, what he calls God's shalom. This shalom is, in turn, a thirst for justice and healing for all people, especially people like this Samaritan woman. Most of all, Jesus thirsts for dignity and respect for all people. Not some people.

Not a lot of people. All people.

This woman knows no respect. But Jesus reaches out to her from his need, not hers, he gives her dignity and respect, there is something she can do for him. Jesus gives her identity and purpose. Suddenly a new confidence, a new spirit wells up inside of her. And from this new spirit, her real thirst is revealed. It is a thirst that will not be quenched by the waters at the bottom of Jacob's well. She thirsts for real life, authentic life, and Jesus gives it to her cost free and without condition.

She, who had no life and no purpose, but only heartache, pain, and shame, is suddenly given the gift of eternal life with Jesus, who is revealed to her as God's own anointed one.

The disciples return with lunch and appear horrified that their master, Jesus, has compromised himself by talking with this woman in broad daylight. The disciples cannot understand the crossing of ancient boundaries, such a departure from the old taboos. While Jesus tries to help the disciples see that this is the kind of life of risk and ministry to which he calls them, the woman runs off, leaving her bucket behind. She does not need it any longer. She has living water welling up inside of her! She is empowered by the simple fact that Jesus trusts her with his needs, his exhaustion and his thirst.

She runs into town and tells everyone of her encounter at the well with the source of true and living water. She says something like, "I belong solely to him. He is my life. He is the hope of my every dream. He is of absolute significance to me. I want you to know him too!"

Notice how the townspeople do not trust her testimony. They run to see for themselves. They end up begging Jesus to stay in their village. Jesus stays for two more days. More people come to know Jesus. And it is all because of the Samaritan woman's willingness to risk talking to the stranger at the well. More

people came to Jesus because of her witness, her word, her willingness to reveal her brokenness to Him. She becomes the first evangelist. Talk about being transformed by grace!

Notice how the townspeople do not even thank her. They do not yet understand what Jesus is saying to them. They cannot see her as He sees her.

Like the Samaritan woman, we all come to the well over and over again looking for this living water. But do we see the man sitting at the well? Can we hear what he is saying to us? Are we even aware he is speaking to us? Can we feel what it is like to be asked by Jesus to do something for him? Can we see how it is that Jesus does not look down on the poor and broken ones?

He doesn't come with something to give them. He doesn't come pretending to tell them how to live their lives. He does not say, "Here, I have what you need, take this and become like me."

Instead, Jesus says that the Samaritan woman has something that he needs. There is something she can do for him. Hearing this news she is liberated from all that weighs her down. He enters into a relationship with her first. He gives her value. He gives her purpose. He gives her new life by simply letting her know there is something she can do for him. We wonder if we might approach the poor and the broken hearted this way.

This Gospel story is asking us if we can approach others in this way. This story is asking us if we are willing to reveal our brokenness to others and to Jesus. Later in the Gospel we will hear the disciples sounding so utterly unlike this woman. They all jockey for positions of power and prestige in his kingdom and in his church. They sound so much like us, in our dealings with each other as a church. And yet, what does he ask them and us? He is asking us if we are able to drink the cup that He is

soon to drink? He asks us to consider our thirst. He invites us to acknowledge our real thirst, so he can give us the living water that wells up inside of us.

As we move steadfastly toward Holy Week we remember that as the story nears its conclusion on the cross, Jesus is still thirsty.

He is still thirsty today. And we are that Samaritan woman. We come to the well week after week. Week after week Jesus asks us for a drink. We know the kinds of things for which he thirsts. Are we ready to bring him a drink? Are we ready to talk with him? Are we ready to reveal our own brokenness to him? Do we make our full commitment to him?

Jesus is sitting before us right now. He is tired, very, very tired.

He asks us to give him a drink. What shall we do?

AMEN.