

### **John 4:5-42**

<sup>5</sup>So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. <sup>7</sup>A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup>The 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.) <sup>10</sup>Jesus 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.” <sup>11</sup>The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” <sup>13</sup>Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but 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.”

<sup>15</sup>The 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.” <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” <sup>17</sup>The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; <sup>18</sup>for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” <sup>19</sup>The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

<sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship The Lord neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup>But 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. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” <sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” <sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

<sup>27</sup>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?” <sup>28</sup>Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup>“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” <sup>30</sup>They left the city and were on their way to him. <sup>31</sup>Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” <sup>32</sup>But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” <sup>33</sup>So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”

<sup>34</sup>Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. <sup>35</sup>Do 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. <sup>36</sup>The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup>For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ <sup>38</sup>I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

<sup>39</sup>Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” <sup>40</sup>So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup>And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup>They 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.”

## **“Know and Be Known”**

The Pastor at my church in Clemson, SC used to make jokes about his sermon writing habits. It would be Friday and there would be nothing on paper and his colleagues and family would ask how the sermon was coming along. Employing his dry wit Jim would respond, “I am living with the Scripture,” which meant “I have not written a word.”

Though he intended the statement as a joke, there was most certainly truth in it. What he was really trying to say was that the text and God’s Holy Spirit were percolating around in his mind. That is how I feel about our passage today.

I have been dwelling with this text for a few weeks now, trying to make sense of the pieces that bothered me, listening for the invitation in the text for our lives today. The passage reeks of exclusion and prejudice! There are so many layers to it that it simply shocks me. Our story of Jesus for this day involves the relationship, or lack of relationship, between Jesus, a Jew, and this unnamed woman, a Samaritan.

The mistrust and enmity between Jews and Samaritans was deep and historic. It began way back when the Assyrian empire occupied the northern kingdom. During that occupation the Assyrians transported portions of the conquered Jewish population from their native land to other parts of the world to live in the midst of people unrelated to them. When the Assyrians moved some of the Jews out they moved other foreigners to live in Israel. Over time these foreigners intermarried with the remaining Jews and they produced a nation of people who were viewed as “half-breeds.” This nation came to be known as the Samaritans.

These half-Jews/half-foreigners claimed to worship the same Yahweh, God of the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but their practices continued to include elements of pagan worship. For hundreds of years, Jews and Samaritans did not get along and Jews, who came in contact with Samaritans, were considered unclean, and unworthy to enter the temple until they underwent a ritual cleansing.

Let’s try to picture this scene this way...

One day an Israeli security guard walked into the Gaza Strip. Worn out from his journey he sat down by a well. It was about noon when a Palestinian woman came to the well to draw water. When he saw her he said, “Give me a drink.”

Or how about this?

One day a Protestant Irishman walked through Belfast. He went out of his way to walk through the IRA neighborhoods. When he was good and tired he went into a corner pub, an IRA hangout, and said, “give me a Drink.”

Or how about this?

One day, a tomato farmer went for a walk through his fields. When he was good and tired he sat down by one of the trucks carrying the day laborers he picked up for the day. When one of the women approached looking for her water bottle he said, “Give me a drink!”

As you can see this was a conversation that should not have happened. Not only was she a Samaritan, but she was a WOMAN. In Jesus time, women were not what you would call “liberated.” Women had no place in public life. They were not to be seen or heard, especially by RELIGIOUS men who did not even talk to their wives in public. Women were not even allowed to worship with men. She was a Samaritan and a Woman, but

even worse than that, she was a woman of questionable character. “Respectable women” made their trips to the well in the morning when they could greet one another and talk about what was going on in the village. But our woman, our woman was one of the subjects of conversation at the well in the morning. She was surrounded by a cloud of innuendo and impropriety.

So here at the well that day, we have two people who should not be talking, two people who had generations of hostility inscribed into their DNA met at a well and saw each other, they were able to recognize the truth in the other’s life and their value for the world. Jesus talks longer to this woman at the well than he does to anyone else in all the Gospels, longer than he talks to his disciples even.

She is the first person he reveals himself to in the Gospel of John.

She is the first person to recognize him and tell others.

She is the first evangelist.

She leaves the place she is staying that day as if it were any other day. She leaves in search of water. But what she finds is a well so deep, so pure and so clear that for possibly the first time she is able to break through all the social conventions and expectations to recognize who she really is and see God’s glory in the world.

Face to face with the son of God. Face to face with the truth of her life. Face to face and without ever drinking she is filled to overflowing with the Living Waters.

Isn’t that how it happens? We come into God’s presence and we know ourselves fully because we are fully known? The good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful. We come into God’s presence and we see who we are because we first see who God is. We come into God’s presence and we peer down into the deep, pure waters of God’s love and embrace.

But what do we do afterward? Like the woman at the well, do we drop what we were doing and run back to our lives to share this living water with others? Do we go back to our lives and invite others to the well? Do we go back and use all of the many blessings we enjoy so that others might experience the overflowing love of Jesus Christ?

Entrusted to us! The well has been entrusted to us. Let us have the confidence to share the well that fills our lives so that others might know the source of our Living Waters.

Amen and Amen.