

The Third Sunday of Lent  
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Jn 4: 5-42

### Come and See

Last week, I talked about John's gospel as a literary masterpiece. This morning's story is one of my favorites from the gospel—there is a delicious irony at the heart of it—an irony that, when we grasp it fully, gives a sense of John's literary depth. To get the story, however, you need to understand its context. You need to understand wells and stories of wells in the Ancient Near East. What happens at a well? To get a perspective on this, we can turn back to Genesis. There we find Abraham going off from his homeland to the land of God's promise, but when it's time for his son, Isaac, to marry, he sends his servant back home to find a wife. To accomplish this, the servant goes to the local well and finds a wife from the many women who come out to get water. A generation later, when Jacob seeks a wife, he too goes to local well... Wells are where you find the women. They are the ancient pick-up spot, it seems.

So, today, we find Jesus at the well, and along comes a Samaritan woman who obviously has something going on, given the husbands that she has gone through. Jesus "innocently" asks her—really demands from her some water,--now is that a pick-up line, or what? She responds with mock indignation, wondering about this good Jewish boy slumming it with a Samaritan. Jesus answers her with a gem. "If you knew the gift of God who was asking you, you would ask me for a drink..." Before I was married, I wondered about trying this line with women. I figured that I wouldn't get past demanding the drink in the first place. This works better if you're Jesus.

So that's what's delicious about the irony, and it plunges us into the depth of the story. What's happening? Jesus appears to be thirsty, but in fact it's the Samaritan woman who's thirsty, or empty, or whatever we want to call it. She's searching for something. There's a hollowness to her soul. Why else would she be on her sixth husband? The Samaritan like so many of us, is searching for something to fill that hollowness, and when we hit upon a solution, we stick with it. When it doesn't work, that doesn't faze us, we just keep trying it again and again. For some of us, it's food—or maybe we're more specific and it's chocolate. For some of us it's work, for others, drink and for others, new cars or new furniture. For the Samaritan woman, it was men. She had gone through six of them and was flirting with Jesus, trying for number seven.

The irony was that this time, she might have a keeper, but not in the way that she had imagined. The irony only grows richer. He promises her living water and she asks to see his bucket. Now he cuts it off. "Lady, you're barking up the wrong well. Look elsewhere if you want to be satisfied." It's as if they were having two conversations, only, oddly, it was the same one. They were both talking of life, of emptiness and thirst, of satisfaction, but at least one of them didn't understand the other. So Jesus tries to get her on the same page. He tells her to call her husband, and when she says that she has none, he points out that she's had five—just not the man she's living with now.

Jesus' words stung. He meant them to. He wasn't judging her—he was trying to wake her up. He was asking her to see the world differently, honestly, in Spirit and in Truth. He asked her to be honest about herself and her failed attempts to quench her thirst. He wanted her to be honest, so that she could turn to a true source—he wanted the Truth to turn her to the Spirit—the deep well, the living water that would well up within her and not be exhausted....

There are two directions that this sermon could go from here. I could talk about the well, the access to the Spirit within us—the living water of the love of God. We could have a conversation about prayer and the rich life of this community and the many ways that God touches us. That God would fill us, if we would only awaken to it. I've done that a lot, though, and I'll do it again, but not today. There's a second dimension to Jesus' conversation about living water—this water within that bubbles up and is not contained. I'll suppose that we have access to this water—that we're aware of it, and instead I'll ask how it bubbles up. How does the love of God present within us change our lives in the world? How does it affect the world through us?

In the story, the woman goes and tells her friends about what she had found. That she had found living water. I'm sure that they knew of her emptiness—I'm guessing that they had talked about it many times over the dinner table. So perhaps they were dubious of what she had to say, but they also heard, and they can and saw and believed. Only now they believed because of what they had found themselves. They believed because of the ways that Jesus had touched their lives—ways that the woman probably couldn't have guessed..

A key theme of John's gospel is this invitation, "Come and See." This, for John, is evangelism. You simply invite those who are hungry, thirsty, or empty to come and see Jesus and his community. You don't have to explain how it works, you just invite. You trust the love of God that they'll find when they come to speak for itself.

That's how a lot of us came here. We were just invited. "Come and see this gracious place." We came, we were touched, and we stayed. That's important to remember. When we talk of evangelism, it can be scary. It sounds aggressive, or invasive. It forces us, we think, to talk of such a personal thing, our faith. Now, if we can do the last of these, that's great. But evangelism can be much simpler.

It can be a plain invitation. "I've found this nice community, this lovely music, this welcoming place that loves kids, that does yoga..." You don't have to explain how God might touch them here, because you don't know. But if you just invite them to come, you can see from the story that God can be quite a flirt. God can make Godself known.

Jesus tells the disciples that the fields are white for the harvest. Is that right? Are there people around you that are hungry, thirsty, or empty? Is so, can you, like the woman, ask them to come and see?

Amen.