



Hear the Word

from Pastor Mary-Alyce Burleigh

Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Third Sunday in Lent

March 19, 2017

Living Water that Lasts

John 4:5-42

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Creator and from our lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last Sunday we read the story of Nicodemus meeting Jesus on a dark night – a meeting that transformed Nicodemus forever.

This week we meet a woman who was much different from Nicodemus. Nicodemus was rich, powerful, a Pharisee, a leader of the Jewish people. He was accustomed to wealth and privilege. The woman at the well was poor, excluded and utterly powerless. She is portrayed as an outcast, a person of doubtful heritage and morality. In fact we don't even know her name. The Bible does not bother to tell us.

Like Nicodemus, she will be transformed by her meeting with Jesus. As I did last week, I would like to tell the story of the woman at the well from her perspective.

I would like to speak words she might have spoken.

We will listen as she tells her story.

Hello and good morning! My name is...well it doesn't matter...you probably won't remember it anyway. Let me first say it is so very difficult for me to be the center of attention. I am very uncomfortable with all you looking at me.

You see I have had some difficult things happen in my life and when people look at my it is usually with anger, disgust or judgment. My life has been full of rejection and I know my reputation is that of being a sinful woman. So I try to keep a low profile, not cause any problems, but problems have been the story of my life.

It is hard for me to tell you this but you have learned it already from the Gospel reading this morning. Yes, it is true that I have had five husbands and the one I am with now is not my husband. My father arranged my first marriage; I was 13 and my husband was 35. He became tired of me, I suppose, or maybe I was not a good enough wife. Anyway, he took me to the market one day and made me stand on a stool. Every one stopped to watch...and listen. He then said in a loud voice, "I divorce you. I divorce you. I divorce you." And that ended our marriage. That is how divorce happens in my country and my century. It was only husbands who could do the divorcing and suffer no loss in status. I stood on that stool for what seemed

an eternity. People shook their heads at me. Some women I know whispered to each other and laughed. It is so easy to judge. Then everyone moved on. I had no place to go. I suppose that is why I got married again so quickly. And then it happened again. Each time I was rejected I felt a little smaller...like I was shrinking. I was shriveling up inside...no feelings...no happiness...no hope. My soul was as dry as the desert.

One morning, the man I was with sent me to get water at the well; so I got the water jug...it was completely empty. It was large and quite heavy so I balanced it on my head. People usually get their water at the very beginning of the day. I can't go then as I can't bear the way I am treated by the other women. I can't bear their stares and eye-rolls, the gossip. That is why I went at noon...the hottest time of day...but at least I would be alone. As I approached the well, I saw man sitting there. Oh goodness, I thought, I can't go there. What should I do? Maybe I should go back? But we had no water and I would be in big trouble if I brought back an empty water jug. So I went forward. Head down. Scarf over my face with one hand and the other balancing the water jug. I could see the man was dressed like a Jew... and I was a Samaritan. He would be disgusted with me. If you remember your Hebrew Bible, the Babylonians sent the upper and middle class Jewish people into exile for about 75 years. Those of us from the working class were left in the ruins of Jerusalem. Over the years we intermarried with the people of 5 other kingdoms and ethnic origins who had been brought here by the Assyrians after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. When the Jewish exiles returned, we were considered outcasts as we had perverted the race and worshipped differently. Ever since there has been enmity between the people of Samaria and Israel. In your century... it is like the tension you see in your world between the Israelis and Palestinians.

I expected the man to walk away in a huff but....he stayed ... and then actually talked to me. I had never had a Jew speak to me... and certainly not a Jewish man. "Give me a drink," He said, which was really odd because he could see my water jug was empty. I had not yet looked up at him but I knew he was sitting on the edge of the well. When he spoke I did look and our eyes met. His eyes were ...penetrating...as if he could see my soul. But he looked at me with such kindness and compassion that I was not embarrassed that he could see all my secrets. I put the jug down but kept my scarf up. We talked back and forth for a while. It was strange as I think about it now but know that as we talked I began to stand up straighter. He said that he could give me water that would last forever. AND I thought that was great! No more trips to the well, but just as I was thinking about no more trips to the well, our eyes met again. In an instant I knew he was talking about something different kind of water. This man with the penetrating eyes could see I was a desert inside...A desert of loneliness...and insecurity...and fear...and shame. I was as dry inside as the water jug was empty. "Give me this water," I begged. And he smiled. And I was free. This man told me the story of my life. This man noticed me...me, of all people...and he did not belittle or judge me. He was so kind to me. He made me feel worthy. JUST THEN SOME OTHER MEN CAME AND STARTED TALKING TO HIM. THEY SEEMED UPSET.

I backed away. But the man sitting on the well continued to see me. He saw the real me. I can't explain it but I just knew the man must be the messiah. I was so filled with a sense of peace and happiness that I instantly knew what he meant when he said "living water." It was like I, myself had become a fountain. My soul was no longer a desert but a garden. I suppose that is why I left my empty water jug behind; I had to share the living water with the other people in the village. They would look at me with judging eyes. They would be skeptical. I was going to face their disdain and their hypocrisies because that didn't matter. The messiah was here! And I am alive...fully alive! I told many of the villagers the story of the man I would later learn was Jesus of Nazareth. Many of the villagers were also filled with the 'living water' and their lives were also ever changed. Barriers were broken down and for once we were all part of the same ever expanding circle.

AND SO I AM HERE TODAY TO TELL YOU MY STORY.

I AM HERE TO TELL YOU THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE LIVING WATER ALSO FOR YOU.

WHATEVER YOUR DESERT...WHATEVER YOUR THIRST...JESUS CHRIST CAN BE
LIVING WATER ALSO FOR YOU.

AMEN.

LET US PRAY...

HOLY GRACIOUS GOD, give us the eyes to see the true spiritual thirst of the people around me as well as myself. I pray O Lord, like Jesus who did not hesitate to be in conversation, to share the good news with and invite to faith the Samaritan woman at the well - a stranger and outsider. We pray our faith shines brightly everywhere, remembering God's Word and the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.