



A Short Reflection on John 4:5-42, Jesus and the Woman at the Well. (the text was sent a couple of days ago so you could get caught up on the details)

What a wonderful, intriguing encounter. The conversation should never had happed as the woman indicated - **How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"**

But the conversation did take place, much to the surprise of the woman who was not only treated as second class citizen in her community for being a woman, but even below that because she had no husband. She came alone at the hottest part of the day because no

one else wanted to come at that time and no one else wanted her to come with them. She was going for water but looking for something more than water and that is what she found at the well in the person of Jesus. The Living Water that Jesus offered her was the water of God's Grace, God's undeterred Love for all of humanity – even for, and especially for the ones who experience rejection by the community.

Let's be clear, the community was wrong about the woman, she is evidently very astute and understanding and gifted and, in the end she blesses the community that cast her out by telling them about the Messiah who was sitting out at Jacob's well passing out living water that takes your thirst away for a lifetime. The community got happy about this and Jesus spent two days with them explaining all the benefits of the Living Water for the thirsts that had kept their hearts and minds dry.

The Grace of God helped the woman recapture her sense of dignity, it empowered her to use her gifts for the benefit of others, it gave her courage to explore the mysteries of faith. That's what grace does – it changes lives, it lifts up the downtrodden, it gives courage and faith to all those who realize that this grace quenches our spiritual thirst for truth and righteousness.

In the midst of this magnificent story of grace and redemption, the woman, rejected by her community becomes an agent of redemption for this same community – kind of like Jesus, rejected by his own hometown, but soon to return as the savior of the world. And the woman might also have a message for us today.

She wants to understand God more fully, so she starts a conversation with Jesus about the nine centuries old dispute between the Jews of Jerusalem and the Samaritans about who is the true believer and where is the best place to worship. She challenges Jesus to put his stamp down on one side or the other of the controversy: **Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."** Jesus says both the Jews and the Samaritans got it wrong: **Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.** So, the place is not important, the how you worship is not the deciding factor...what God desires (the prophets always were reminding the people and priests of this) is that our lives reflect the spirit of God and the truth of God.

This week, when the reality of the crisis we are facing with Covid 19 was finally becoming clear to us and our leaders decided we actually had to take some serious actions in order to avoid disaster, the schools closed and many of the churches closed, as did our church, Zion Lutheran. Some folks were questioning why churches closed and some churches objected that it would be an affront to God to suspend worship services. But, in a time of danger to all people what would it mean to worship God in Spirit and Truth? This is our version of the question the woman at the well asked – is worshiping God a matter of showing up on Sunday, or is it more a matter of having our lives reflect the spirit of God and the truth of God. Ironically for some, logically for others, the suspending of worship at a time when such gatherings go against the need of our communities to restrict social contact in order to save lives might be more the kind of true worship that Jesus said was coming when we would worship God in spirit and truth.

God's spirit is one of compassion, one of sacrifice for the common good. God's truth is we all belong to each other and we should all care for each other. Sunday worship at church, in church, all members present is something that we really need in our world, but there is something more than this that the world needs – it needs the kind of love that is willing to sacrifice for the sake of common good. We all are giving up much of what we love this lent, without wanting to – our ball games, our concerts, our days at school, our easy money on the market, our shopping spree addictions, our joy at moving around as we please, but this my friends just may be what it means to worship God in spirit and truth.

I don't know the author of the poem that follows, but it has been making the rounds on Facebook these days and I think it captures something of what Jesus might say to us if we were to meet him at the well today outside our town and ask him about what it means to worship God.

Prayer for a Pandemic

May we who are merely inconvenienced remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips remember those who have no safe place to go.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country, let us choose love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

Amen