



John 4: 5-42

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March 19, 2017

“Everything I’ve Ever Done”

Scripture stories make for fine listening.

And, they are meant to be taken in through our ears and welcomed into the temple that is our very flesh.

This morning’s account of the meeting of the Samaritan woman and the Rabbi Jesus is just one such story.

So, this morning, I share with you the story as the woman herself might have told it. Hearing this encounter with Jesus through the voice of the Samaritan woman helps me to know this story as my own.

So, I share it with you. As she might have told it.

I have a name. For centuries, the story has been told about me without my name and I understand it being told that way because knowing me by my race and my gender makes the story of my meeting with Jesus even more powerful. So, I will remain nameless.

What you need to know is why I was at the well at high noon.

I was there because no one else was.

I was there when the sun was hottest because people in my community felt very comfortable shutting me out of their company. To go to the well when the drawing is best and the conversation most sustaining, I would have to endure the stares and the shunning and the ceasing of conversation upon my approach.

I have had five husbands. I can feel them recoil, wondering if I am somehow cursed.

And the man I am living with now? He is not my husband.

Oh, I know. It is easy to shake your head and wonder at a woman who could marry so many and welcome yet another but I wonder if you have ever tried to live without food or a home.

I wonder if you have ever felt as vulnerable as a woman in my culture is made to feel when there is no man to support her? Without a man, I am without home, food, protection.

So, I draw water at noon when it is easier to work in the silence of my own space.

The judgement I experience from others shrivels my soul. I cannot much afford it.

The thing that makes the judgement more incomprehensible is that we Samaritans know what it feels like to be judged by the Jews.

We feel it all the time.

We share a belief in the God of Israel. We spring from the same roots as the Jews, but through conflicts of tribe and differences of opinion about the proper place to worship God, we have become bitter enemies of the Jews.

They call us unclean.

So, we keep to ourselves, even as we know the sting of judgement well.

So, I set out, with my own burdens and prejudices and pain on the day when I met the man Jesus.

I was so surprised to see a man sitting at the edge of the well.

At high noon.

A man I knew at once was no Samaritan.

Sure that I would have to return at a later time to get the water I needed for my household, I turned to leave.

But this man did not honor the code of public silence which had been my life for so long.

This man spoke. To me. A Samaritan woman.

“Woman”, he said, “Give me a drink.”

Imagine it. In the blazing heat of the day the most unlikely of interchanges between the most unlikely of people.

Me, a woman long used to silence and avoidance, was asked to provide the most essential of giftings:

The gift of water.

Well, I know that the way I answered him doesn't sound very gracious to those who have listened to our story through the ages.

But I had to ask him:

“Do you know what you are doing by speaking to me?”

It only seemed fair to ask.

He answered with a riddle of sorts - at least that is how it sounded to me. But with each thing he said I felt the shrouding of my heart drop away.

He talked about how I should have somehow known him -

And he spoke about “living water” - a water that would forever more take the parch of my soul and body away.

Water that would become in me and in everyone else who drank of it a spring of life now and for eternity and -

well, wouldn't YOU want to taste this living water?

I put down my bucket and I looked at him and he looked at me and the heat of the day and the loneliness of the well disappeared and he must have sensed the bubbling of hope in me but he did a thing that pained me and brought me back to the shame that lives in me because he said -

“Go get your husband”.

And I thought that it really had been too good to be true this living water hope.

He would now know he was talking to damaged goods.

But he knew! Even before we exchanged a word he somehow knew my story and it didn't matter to him.

And it didn't matter to him where God is best worshipped.

What mattered to him was that God would be worshipped in a way not bound by titles like Jew or Samaritan but in a way, that invites ALL PEOPLE - even me! - to open to God's spirit and to God's truth and to the heart of God reaching toward us always always and as we talked I shared the hope of our peoples

that God would send a Messiah to lead us into healing and into living in peace and keep us from the scrabbling over who is right and who is wrong so that we can live in a world where women don't have to draw water alone at high noon and no one is vulnerable to being homeless or hungry.

And again. The man amazed me because he said something that stopped my breath.

When I mentioned the longing for the Messiah he said:

“I am he. The one speaking to you.”

In the timeless stillness of those moments I felt the bubbling up of tears born from wonder and from the well of grief I have lived - the pain and the loneliness and the wondering if somehow God had given up on me.

The words of the man Jesus were amazing to me.

Not only that he was the Messiah, but that the Messiah would engage with ME as someone worthy of human connection and conversation.

Me?

A well of hope and tears and a sense of being alive and free to be welcomed into the world was the living water of which the man spoke.

Water brought to my body and soul not through dippers or well buckets.

Water drenching my soul through the compassion shown to me by this man who broke the silence of my shame and isolation.

So, I will tell this story to any and all who will listen.

I, who was invisible and despised.

I am thirsty no more.

My soul has been watered by grace.

And I, I am alive and wild with the wonder of it.

Amen