

## Two Thirsty People

Lent 3A 2008 The Samaritan woman John 4

Pastor Christa von Zychlin, Our Savior's Hartland, WI 53029



A Jew and a Samaritan in Jesus day, were as clearly & immediately from different sides as Shiite and a Sunni Muslim walking on the same street in Baghdad. As opposite as a Hillary supporter and a Huckabee supporter casting their vote at the same polling place in Waukesha county. As immediately aware of the great divide of their past histories as an Arrowhead High School parent and a Homestead High School parent, arriving at a state level sports event in Madison.

Jesus was entering enemy territory when we read here in John 4 that he HAD to go through Samaria.

He had to go both for a *practical* reason, Samaria is the shortest distance between Judea & Galilee, where he was going.

And, he had to go through Samaria for a *spiritual* reason, there was someone he was to meet there. A certain woman.

Watch in the gospel of John, how often the physical & the spiritual aspects of the story of Jesus match up...

Last week Nicodemus came to Jesus by night for a practical reason – he as a member of the established faculty didn't want anyone to catch him speaking to this renegade new teacher, Jesus of Nazareth.

So Nicodemus came by night, *practically*, in order to keep hidden, but also he came by night *spiritually*, because he was in the dark as far as who this Jesus really was.

Even earlier in the Gospel of John chapter 2, Jesus responds to an immediate need – we need more wine for this wedding reception!... with a very practical solution – he makes more wine... but it's also a spiritual event.. Jesus brings exuberant new energy into what people thought was just an administrative disaster. It was. But it was also an occasion for God' mercies. When people are empty... then they can be filled.

Do you see? Today you sometimes hear people talk about religion or spirituality as meaning we should somehow escape the details & the business aspects & the practical concerns of this world and live our lives on a higher, more spiritual plane, above it all.

but Christianity means following a very earthly God -- Jesus, a man who gets tired. Gets thirsty. Here in John chapter 4 –Jesus *THE SON OF GOD* has to sit down after taking a long walk. Has to have his disciples go and buy food in the market place. Has to enter enemy territory – Samaria, in order to travel to his own home... and God uses the earthy bits of Jesus' life in order to make his kingdom come.

In our lives that's true too, tho sometimes it's so hard to believe it.

So, the earthly hostility between Jews & Samaritans was long established --- The Samaritans ancestors were originally Jews considered too insignificant to be carted off to the Babylonian exile, so they were left behind there in Samaria where they had proceeded to intermarry with non Jews & then developed pretty much their own religion. They didn't believe in the whole Old Testament, just the first five books, & they didn't believe in going to worship in Jerusalem, they had their own place of worship here on a mountain in Samaria, thank you very much. In general, they were poorer, less educated, considered backward, so let's be honest, the Jews looked at the Samaritans a lot like many Americans today might look at Muslims, or Jews in Israel might look at Palestinians, or like *certain* kinds of Christians look down on *other* kinds of Christian for that matter. And what do we Lutherans really think about Jehovah's witnesses, Mormons or those Muslims building a mosque in Waukesha? I've got a few questions, don't you?

So Jesus as a Jew, was clearly the outsider, coming into Samaritan country

He heads to Jacobs well, also for a practical matter. Remember, He's tired. He's thirsty. And did you realize? He doesn't have a bucket! He's empty handed,,, and you can wonder again about some of those administrative details among the disciples. Whose job was it that morning to make sure there was enough water in the water flasks so that they wouldn't be stuck at high noon without a drop to drink? Did Jesus have a flash of irritation, that his disciples didn't do a better job of planning?

But Jesus had to be there. Bucketless. Because he had an appointment to keep.

Maybe you'll find yourself in an awkward situation this week. Somebody leaves you high and dry. But maybe it will turn out to be an appointment that God had in mind for you..

That's what it means to follow Jesus. Looking for moments when tiredness & work & even irritations... turn into spiritual encounters & gifts.

So there's Jesus. And along comes this woman. Endless speculation on why the Samaritan woman comes to fetch water in the heat of the day.... It makes sense that *most* women would have come in the morning or in the cool of the evening,

It makes sense that *most* women in that day would come in groups, because the town well was the meeting spot and the place where the children played and the spot where travelers might come... in the morning normally to get water, or in the evening to find a place for a meal and a good night's sleep. Not, you would think, at noon.

Jesus is an outsider to the Samaritans, but it appears that in some way this woman is an outsider among her own people.

Maybe it's those 5 different husbands she's gone through in her life so far. Doesn't tend to make you popular in town. Maybe it's the guy she's living with now, did he used to be somebody else's husband, maybe with a family that he's abandoned for her, this one?

Or Maybe as one mom of preschoolers in my Bible study suggested, she's there at high noon because the buckets she hauled home earlier that day were knocked over by her two year old!

For whatever reason she comes at noon, it's a coming together of 2 poor & needy people, if you will. Jesus poor & thirsty physically, the woman poor & thirsty spiritually.

First, though, it's the woman who's got something that Jesus needs. The well (which is well known and still exists today in Israel) is 125 feet deep. Fed by an underground river. It's not the place where you can scoop the water up with your own hands and drink. The woman has the bucket. And Jesus is extroverted enough or thirsty enough or maybe just compelled by God enough to say, "Give me a drink"

And that launches the two of them into the longest conversation ever recorded between Jesus and another person. Not with Peter, not with Nicodemus, not with his enemy Herod, not with his mother Mary, was there ever recorded a conversation this long, this playful, or with this wonderful of an outcome, as this conversation between a thirsty Jesus, and a woman extroverted enough, or thirsty enough, or just compelled by God enough, to ask for the living water which she also can't just scoop up herself but she needs Jesus to give her, as a gift.

One last little material detail I'll mention -- Did you notice what she does with her water jar? (John 4 verse 28 )One commentator says the reason that the Gospel mentions that she left her jar behind is to show that she herself has become a bucket, a jar of living water, ready to bring Jesus' exuberant new energy into other people's lives.

As you go through your week this week, this year, this life; pay attention, real attention to the people you encounter. Especially those who are in any way part of "enemy territory" The guy with the opposite political affiliation as yourself.

The woman with the angry eyes at the grocery store.

The new kid with the jammed locker at school.

The salesperson who works for the competition.

The 5 times divorced parent.

And ask Jesus to let you bring a bucket of his life giving water & new energy into their tired lives. And like the Samaritan woman, you just may get way more than you imagined, in return. It may be the start of a life-giving conversation that you will remember your whole life long.

Amen.

AMEN.