

Third Sunday in Lent - March 12, 2023

(Good News translation)

John 4:5-42

5 In Samaria he came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the trip, sat down by the well. It was about noon. 7 (A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water. 8 His disciples had gone into town to buy food.) 9 The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan - so how can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.) 10 Jesus answered, "If you only knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water." 11 "Sir," the woman said, "you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? 12 It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his children and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?" 13 Jesus answered, "Those who drink this water will get thirsty again, 14 but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life." 15 "Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water." 16 "Go and call your husband," Jesus told her, "and come back." 17 "I don't have a husband," she answered. Jesus replied, "You are right when you say you don't have a husband. 18 You have been married to five men, and the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth." 19 "I see you are a prophet, sir," the woman said. 20 "My Samaritan ancestors worshiped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God." 21 Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. 23 But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants. 24 God is Spirit, and only by the power of his Spirit can people worship him as he really is." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything." 26 Jesus answered, "I am he, I who am talking with you." 27 At that moment Jesus' disciples returned, and they were greatly surprised to find him talking with a woman. But none of them said to her, "What do you want?" or asked him, "Why are you talking with her?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar, went back to the town, and said to the people there, 29 "Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?" 30 So they left the town and went to Jesus. 31 In the meantime the disciples were begging Jesus, "Teacher, have something to eat!" 32 But he answered, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 So the disciples started asking among themselves,

"Could somebody have brought him food?" 34 "My food," Jesus said to them, "is to obey the will of the one who sent me and to finish the work he gave me to do. 35 You have a saying, "Four more months and then the harvest.' But I tell you, take a good look at the fields; the crops are now ripe and ready to be harvested! 36 The one who reaps the harvest is being paid and gathers the crops for eternal life; so the one who plants and the one who reaps will be glad together. 37 For the saying is true, "Someone plants, someone else reaps.' 38 I have sent you to reap a harvest in a field where you did not work; others worked there, and you profit from their work." 39 Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they begged him to stay with them, and Jesus stayed there two days. 41 Many more believed because of his message, 42 and they told the woman, "We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world."



Focus: **Reaching out to the thirsty.**

Function: To follow Christ's way in reaching out to people in need of life-giving water.

Today's Gospel story centres on Jesus and a Samaritan woman. As Jesus travelled from Judea to Galilee, he stopped in the town of Sychar around noon time, tired and thirsty from the journey. There he sat down by a well and asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of water.

Why was Jesus in Samaria in the first place, I wonder? All Jews would avoid Samaria if all possible when they travel between Judea and Galilee; they would travel along the Jordan river bank to bypass Samaria. For all we know, there is a long-lasting hatred between Jews and Samaritans which originated from the Samaritan's strong opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem led by Nehemiah and his fellow Jews who returned from exile in Babylon in the 5th century BC (see

Nehemiah 6:1-14). Moreover, the Samaritans are the descendants of Jews, who were left behind in Samaria when the northern kingdom of Israel was defeated by the Assyrians in the 7th century BC, and intermarried with the influx of gentiles (see 2 Kings 17). As a result, the Jews despised the Samaritans and would not associate with them in any way. In view of that, Jesus had walked the way less taken by the Jews, and he intended to encounter the Samaritans.

On the other hand, the Samaritan woman in the story was not given a name, I wonder who she is. It was timely that she was at the well to help Jesus get some water for his thirst, but why was she there at the hottest time of the day?

In the story, Jesus pointed out that she was married 5 times, and the man she was living with then was not really her husband. In understanding this in the literal sense, she would have experienced the frequent death of her five husbands like in the case we encounter in Mark 12:19-22. It is a situation that, according to Moses' Law, if a man dies and leaves his wife without children, then the man's brother must marry the widow so that they can have children who will be considered the dead man's children.' But if the second husband also dies and still leaves no children, then the next brother will marry her. With this understanding, this Samaritan woman is deemed to be in this sad life situation whereby all her five husbands, who were all related, had died without leaving her any children. However, her current husband might not be a relative of the deceased husbands, hence not really her husband according to the tradition. In view of that, she's likely despised by her fellow people, marginalised and bombarded by gossip. Understandably, she had chosen the hottest time of the day to be at the well for water when other people would prefer to stay indoors.

Jesus's request for a drink of water shocked the woman. "'You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan - so how can you ask me for a drink?'" (4:9) she responded. The very thought that Jesus being a Jew would talk to her, and even use her cup to drink, was beyond her comprehension. Moreover, being an outcast in her own community, OR at least she likely felt that she was when she avoided the other women at the well, to be approached by Jesus would undoubtedly surprise her. And even Jesus's disciples were very surprised to find Jesus talking to the woman when they returned from buying lunch (4:27). So apparently, it is taboo to do that.

In the ancient Jewish world during the New Testament times, which was very patriarchal, women were separated from men in private, public, and religious life. Men would speak to women directly and publicly IF they were related by blood. John 2:4 cites such an example at the wedding at Cana where Jesus addressed his mother, Mary; there was no social barrier for them to converse in public. So, bearing this tradition in mind, we can see a deeper dimension to Jesus addressing the Samaritan woman.

Jesus had treated her like someone related to him by blood; he talked with her on the same terms as he addressed his mother. Jesus had removed that invisible social barrier and received this woman as an insider, a “blood relative.” He reached out to her, brought up her past, and also her present, not to shame her, but to take away their grasp on her that had entrapped her spiritually and emotionally.

The encounter was the perfect opportunity for Jesus to reach into her parched soul which was crying out to be quenched, and for her to be liberated spiritually. Jesus assured her, saying, “Those who drink this water from the well will get thirsty again, but those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life.” By that, Jesus refers to the gifting of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that will inspire & guide us to have the fullness of life; thus we shall never be thirsty again spiritually.

“Sir, give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water,” the woman responded. Perhaps at that very instance, she was attracted by the very idea that she need not have to come to the well for water any more, but as her conversation with Jesus deepened, her faith in Jesus grew, and she came to recognise Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. She came to realise worshipping God is not limited to places, but essentially to worship God as God really is, in the Spirit and in truth.

She was excited, and she couldn’t keep it in. She left her water jar by the well and hurried back to the village, telling everyone about Jesus: “Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?” Indeed, gone was her fear of being despised and rejected by her people. She had been released spiritually and emotionally, not worried about what others would think of her, and was able to live among her people freely.

This story of Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well reminds us that the kingdom of God is a realm of inclusion, not exclusion; of dignity, not belittlement; of empowerment instead of exploitation; and of affirmation rather than marginalization. Jesus is willing and ready to break down any social barrier to reach the other because he does not desire any human being to be lost in desolation, and to shrivel and die from a parched soul. Instead, he wants to quench the deepest needs and desires of each one of us with the life-giving water of his Spirit.

So, where do we find ourselves in this story? Where are you in this story?

Perhaps you are like the Samaritan woman before reaching the well, your soul is all dried up by the troubles and issues you are struggling with in life, thirsting for social, emotional and spiritual nourishment. Jesus’s hand is extended to you

now, ready to give you his life-giving water, would you come, draw closer to him? You shall never thirst again.

Perhaps you are like the woman having experienced Jesus, received the life-giving water, and embraced Jesus as the Messiah, the liberating and uplifting joy is overwhelming. Would you share that with others? As a result of her having broken free from the fear of rejection by her people, the woman gladly shared with her people the good news about her encounter with Jesus, and they too came to experience Jesus and believe. "We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world," they affirmed.

Here at Kew Uniting Church, partnering with BCO, and not limited to, we have many opportunities to meet people whose lives are in desolation and isolation socially, emotionally and spiritually. They are thirsty for acceptance, care, support, and friendship to journey along and listen to their stories. Like what Jesus had done at the well, we are called to be Christ's agents to reach out to the thirsty, and through our love, quench their thirst by bringing them God's love and the life-giving water of Christ. The life-giving action of the Holy Spirit will take effect in the deepest recesses of their being to comfort, console, encourage and strengthen as they continue to experience God's gracious love.

Indeed, we are all called to this ministry: reach out to the thirsty. Regardless of our age, from the young to the elderly, we are called as our own thirst has been quenched by the life-giving water of Christ. So let us answer God's call today. Amen.