

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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Sermon, March 12, 2023

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John 4:5-42

The woman in the Gospel lesson for today is often interpreted to be a kind of loose woman, a woman who sleeps around, a scarlet woman of promiscuous disposition. It's obvious, don't you see? She comes to the well in the heat of the day, not in the cool morning or evening when the other women gather to talk and gossip as they get water, but alone, shunned.

We find out more when Jesus tells her to go get her husband and she says she doesn't have one. Jesus says she has had five husbands and the man she is with now is not her husband. Shocking! Clearly, she is a home breaker and has flitted from man to man, and now, even worse, she is living in sin!

Very dramatic, very exciting! Not very likely.

First of all, whatever else you might say about this woman, she does not seem to be stupid. And it would have been even stupider in Jesus's day than it is nowadays to commit adultery because back in Jesus' day you could get stoned for it.

Some scholars suggest that, instead of being a loose woman, this woman, might not have been able to have children. She would have been shunned by the other women because not being able to have children was considered a kind of curse. She might have married one husband after another, and when each husband discovered he could not have children with her, he divorced her. Maybe the guy she's with will at least let her stay in the house.

Interestingly, the text does not seem to care whether this woman is a scarlet woman or not. It makes no mention of adultery. Scripture addresses adultery elsewhere, not here. The woman shows no remorse. Repentant sinners show remorse in other places, not here.

The text does not seem interested in the woman's virtue at all, one way or the other. Instead, the text seems interested in her gradual and growing knowledge of Jesus. Jesus says to her, "Give me something to drink."

At this point, the woman experiences Jesus as an obtrusive, rude Jewish peasant. Someone who crashes across boundaries. Samaritans and Jews did not get along. But here is Jesus, rolling across that barrier.

I think we find Jesus to be this way with us as well. Nowadays, Jesus crashes over all our barriers: Barriers between rich and poor, between Christian and Muslim and Jew. Barriers between Black and White, Asian and Hispanic and Indigenous people. Jesus breaks barriers between gay and straight, transgender, gender fluid and cisgender. And dare I say it? He even breaks down barriers between Republican and Democrat, liberal and conservative. He smashes through the little siloes that we build around ourselves.

"Hey Jesus, you're wrecking my silo!"

Rude. Obtrusive.

Notice, though, what the woman does not do. She does not just walk away. She does not scream at Jesus. She does not question his integrity or his sanity as is so popular to do when people wreck our siloes now. Instead, she asks a question.

"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan?"

And now the game is afoot. Now begins the longest conversation Jesus has with anyone in all of Scripture. Now, the woman begins to grow.

Notice, she does not understand who Jesus is at first. Neither did Nicodemus last week. Neither will the man born blind next week, nor Mary Magdalene at the end of the Gospel of John, on Easter. None of them get it right at first.

Neither do we. We don't have all the answers. We don't even have the right questions, over here arguing over whether the woman is promiscuous or not when the text doesn't even care.

Jesus says to her, "If you knew who was asking, you would ask, and he would give you water welling up to eternal life."

The woman takes Jesus literally. This happens all the time in the Gospel of John. People take Jesus literally when he is speaking spiritually. This is nothing new. Everybody takes some parts of the Bible literally and some parts, spiritually, we just disagree on which parts.

The woman takes Jesus literally. Instead of a rude, obtrusive peasant, she now things of him as a magician, who will give her super powers. She will never have to drink again. She can cross vast deserts. Maybe with her well of water, she can give water to people lost in the desert, dying of thirst. Maybe she can water crops in a drought, or even wash away her enemies with huge torrents, sploosh, sploosh. Here comes the next Marvel Movie: the Splooshing Water Woman.

Sometimes, we think of Jesus as a magician, a miracle worker too. Just look as what God will do in your life if only you accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.

And Jesus does do miracles in our lives. Some of them are wonderful miracles, things we have asked for and needed. But Jesus is not a magician, to wave a magic wand and make things all better. Jesus does miracles, but not always the miracles we want, because it's not about us. We are not Jesus's customers. We are Jesus' servants.

Now Jesus comes to the heart of things, to the core. Jesus says, "Go, get your husband." She says, "I don't have a husband." Jesus says, "you've had five and the man you're with now is not your husband."

Something is wrong here. Maybe this woman is addicted to sex, so she sleeps around even though it's dangerous. Many good hearted and compassionate people are addicted to sex, as some are to alcohol and drugs and gambling and greed and power. Maybe she just can't have children, so that people shun her, treat her like she doesn't exist.

But Jesus comes to where she hurts.

This will happen to us, sooner or later. Jesus will come to the places where we hurt, where we are broken and petty and sinful and even cruel. He will bring God's love there. But God's love, while saving our souls, is also devastatingly honest.

She says, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet," that is, someone who speaks the truth about God. Then she asks him about the well, and where God is with respect to the well, to the everyday things of life, the places where we get water, where we meet and chat, our history and heritage, our jobs and our families. Where is God in all of that?

Jesus says, in the end, "I am." That's the name of God. When Moses asks God what God's name is, God says, "I am." Jesus says, "I am."

The woman runs to her companions and tells them about Jesus. They come and say that Jesus is the savior of the world.

We won't get it right at first. Our whole lives are a journey of discovery and wonder. Like this woman, like Nicodemus, like Mary Magdalene, we will grow.

For example, this week the Department of Justice issued a report on the Louisville Police Department, citing discrimination of various kinds. City officials are working with the DOJ on what is called a consent decree. This is a hot button issue.

I do not claim to have all the answers. But I know God is in this, because God is everywhere. I believe God wants peace and wholeness for everyone, both police and people. God wants everyone to be treated with respect, both people and police.

I also believe that if we follow Jesus in this matter, then Jesus is going to be obtrusive, rude. He is going to crash our silos. Jesus will do miracles too. He will touch our most vulnerable and even sinful places with devastating honesty. And if by the Holy Spirit's help, we stay in the conversation and don't walk away, or scream at each other, or deny one another's integrity or sanity, I believe we will find out once again, that Jesus is the savior of the world. That's how it works. Thanks be to God.