

### Third Sunday of Lent year A

*John 4:5-42*

Today's is an admittedly long Gospel passage, but one well worth the labour.

It is the story of a disturbing and moving encounter:

- Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well
- Jesus meets this woman whose heart is broken, and whose life is drudgery

Hmm: they meet at Jacob's well, where Jacob met Rachel.

Does that encounter perhaps prefigure this encounter?

Does Jesus come to "espouse" this woman?

Is this a revelation of Jesus as *Bridegroom*?

Let us see...

Jesus is passing through Samaria, the region of the estranged, of the impure,  
of those with whom the Jews do not mingle.

Jesus travels freely, and Jesus *mingles* freely.

It is high noon, i.e. the sun is at its peak.

High noon is the hour of most intense heat, and thus the hour to draw water.

Jesus knows this.

Thus, "tired from the journey" (4:6; deliberately chosen, real fatigue),

Jesus sits at the well.

What a deliciously, strategically *planned* encounter. This is Jesus' *initiative*.

Jesus conveniently sent the disciples to Ledo's Pizza

because he wants to encounter this woman.

They need to be alone,

because the presence of the disciples would probably have inhibited her.

The Samaritan woman comes, going through her daily motions, surely exhausted.

And Jesus engages her rather directly.

In fact, Jesus seems to approach her rudely, with very little finesse.

"Give me a drink." ...no introduction, no "please", nothing.

Some understandably might have responded,

"Uh, excuse me: who are you?" or "Nobody tells me what to do."

The poor woman is beaten by life and by the mid-day sun.

Why is Jesus not more gentle and inviting and poetic?

We unfortunately do not have the *tone* with which Jesus speaks.

What Jesus seemingly seeks to do is to awaken her.

What Jesus seemingly seeks to do is to reach through the heaviness,

through her inability to respond with any enthusiasm or wonder.

Jesus does not order her.

Jesus chooses to be vulnerable with her.

Jesus *begs* from her...

Not hearing *her* tone of voice, it is difficult to discern how she responds.  
Is it cynicism? Is it disturbance at Jesus' transgression?  
Perhaps she is surprised by Jesus' freedom.  
Jesus has ignored two important barriers.  
She is a *Samaritan* and a *woman*: so politically incorrect...  
She then asks Jesus about his disregard for protocol.

In response to her surprise, Jesus speaks very mysteriously.  
He does not answer the question.  
Instead, He speaks of "the gift of God" and of "living water".  
They are *not* immediately or exactly on the same page...

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Jesus goes fishing in her heart, and she begins to take the hook.  
Little by little Jesus reaches her in her tired heart.  
He hopes to awaken a desire, as He reveals a gift that He brings.  
She is so "been there, done that", so blasé and so burdened that she no longer desires.  
She is largely indifferent.  
She responds,  
but the only thing that she manages to say is that Jesus is ill-equipped to draw water!  
"You don't even have a bucket."

She does not realize what Jesus is saying, yet something is awakening.  
Without really understanding, she begins to want the gift of Jesus  
– if anything, because, as she understands it, she will no longer have to fetch water,  
i.e. no more drudgery(!).

Jesus then capitalizes on the awakening of her heart, and shifts gears.  
Jesus requests that she fetch not water but her husband.  
Now, why does Jesus do this when He is well aware of her situation,  
of her pain and her despair?  
There is definitely despair: the latest guy she does not even qualify as "husband"...  
Jesus puts His finger right on the painful wounds and her despair.  
Jesus does this probably for at least 2 reasons:

1. despair leads to inability to act  
(she was incapable of taking much initiative with respect to Jesus)
2. because the wounds are well-guarded

The only way for Jesus to be able to reach her is:

1. to take the initiative with respect to her
2. to uncover her wounds, to remove the layers of sadness and bitterness

Jesus definitely puts her on the spot as He reads into her broken heart.  
But we can and must always safely presume that Jesus proceeds *lovingly*.  
Indeed: instead of being overwhelmed with crushing embarrassment,  
she recognizes in Jesus

- a prophet (Jesus is prophet most properly in reading our hearts...)
- someone who can receive the other, deeper wound of her heart

(which she has had for a *longer time*, i.e. since childhood)

There is another wound which is not that uncommon,  
but which does not cross our minds often,

because we are often thinking in romantic terms.

There is a wound regarding *worship*,

which, odd as it may sound, is a deeper wound, for worship is a *deeper love*.

This woman does not know where worship must take place,

There have been conflicting stories which have left her unsure.

Consequently, she no longer worships. Her heart is stifled.

Jesus, however, opens and heals her heart. Jesus helps her to be “real” once again.

“Believe me woman, the hour is coming when you will worship.”

What Jesus *reveals* Jesus *gives*.

Henceforth, thanks to Jesus, to the Messiah, worship is “in spirit and in truth”.

What does this mean?

We worship *with Jesus*, Who, being the God-man, alone worships perfectly.

Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to us who know not how to pray.

To worship “in spirit” is to worship in the Holy Spirit,

Who prays in us, and enables us to pray.

To worship “in truth” is to worship in all that we are, including our bodies.

Jesus indeed heals this woman, in her double-woundedness.

Jesus gives her “living water” that “becomes a spring welling up to eternal life”.

What is “living water”?

Water is not normally “living”.

Jesus uses a metaphor regarding something that is connected to its source, and is flowing.

“Living water” is *divine love*, which is connected to its source: God.

“Created charity (divine love)

is a participation in *uncreated* charity that is the Holy Spirit.”

Living water is divine love, which heals us, and enables us to love again and to worship.

Divine love ought to overflow in us, freeing us.

Jesus frees this woman of her wounds.

They do not necessarily disappear, but she can freely love.

There is a great sign of this:

she leaves her water jug, i.e. her little claim to fame.

Her water jug becomes entirely unimportant.

She has found her purpose: being loved by and loving the Messiah.

*Freedom follows love.*

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