

**Gospel of John: Close Encounters of the First Kind**  
**session #3: *Jesus Encounters the Samaritan Woman***  
***Thursday, November 6, 2008***

From the prologue of John, we moved to a first encounter:  
the encounter with Nicodemus.

From the prologue of John in which is revealed the Word,

- the true light which enlightens everyone
- the Word become flesh,  
who gives the power to become children of God,

we moved to the encounter with Nicodemus

who represents the intelligence of Israel,

whom Jesus seeks to enlighten

and to whom Jesus reveals the mystery of divine rebirth.

In between the prologue and the encounter with Nicodemus, of course,  
there are a few other important encounters:

1. John the Baptist
2. the first disciples, John, Andrew, Simon Peter, Phillip and Nathaniel
3. the guests at the wedding feast at Cana, *and, of course*
4. all the wonderful persons in the temple  
when Jesus does his spring cleaning (!)

Now, what is interesting is that, at the beginning of this series of encounters  
—one of which we have considered: Nicodemus—

John the Baptist offers a testimony to Jesus

in which he twice designates Jesus as “the Lamb of God”.  
John the Baptist thus designates Jesus as the one awaited by Israel,  
to be offered as sin offering. As we read in Isaiah.

**Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers,  
he was silent and opened not his mouth.  
If he gives his life as an offering for sin,  
he shall see his descendants in a long life,  
and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.  
Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days.  
Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,  
and their guilt he shall bear.  
Therefore I will give him his portion among the great,  
and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty,  
because he surrendered himself to death  
and was counted among the wicked;  
And he shall take away the sins of many,  
and win pardon for their offenses. (53:7,10-end)**

After this series of encounters—after Jesus’ long discourse to Nicodemus,  
we find John the Baptist again.

In the midst of a controversy over ceremonial washings,  
John the Baptist’s disciples approach him,  
unsettled by the presence of Jesus nearby, baptizing.  
John the Baptist offers another testimony.

**Now a dispute arose between the disciples of John and a Jew about ceremonial washings.  
So they came to John and said to him,  
"Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him."  
John answered and said,  
"No one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven.  
You yourselves can testify that I said (that) I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him.  
The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.  
So this joy of mine has been made complete.  
He must increase; I must decrease. (3:25-20)**

He designates Jesus as the "bridegroom".

It is actually quite moving.

John the Baptist tells his disciples not to worry.

Jesus is the bridegroom. He is but the *best man*.

Jesus is the one who comes to betroth.

He is there but to facilitate the betrothal.

And he stands and listens for the bridegroom and rejoices at his voice.

And, in simply hearing his voice, his joy is made complete.

He then declares that the bridegroom must increase and he must decrease.

This is what we call poverty of spirit

which opens us mysteriously to the joy of the bridegroom.

Now, it is not far-fetched  
to consider this second testimony of John the Baptist  
to be the light in which we are to read

    this subsequent, second series of encounters.

To do so is perhaps surprising, surely interesting,  
for the next three encounters are with persons  
outside the parameters of the chosen people,  
i.e. with persons who are *not* chosen.

One would expect the opposite to occur:

- Jesus as bridegroom to encounter the chosen people
- Jesus as lamb of God to encounter the rest, i.e. the Gentiles.

In other words, one would expect

- intimate love for those inside the circle
- mercy for those outside the circle.

Instead, it is the bridegroom who goes in pursuit of those beyond Israel.

What is revealed is the gratuitousness and haste of love.

Love knows no boundaries. Love knows no limits.

Indeed, as we read in verse 34 of this very chapter 3:

    “God does not ration His gift.”

*And*, love is in a hurry.

Jesus does first come to his people

but “His own people did not accept him” (1:11).

Hence, there is no time to waste lingering. Jesus moves on.

Indeed, regardless even of such circumstances, love wastes no time.

Jesus must love *the world*.

There are three Jesus “Gentile” encounters.

Jesus encounters three outcasts

(cast out in different ways, for different reasons):

- the Samaritan woman by the well in Sychar
- the royal official whose son is ill in Capernaum
- the sick man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem

And so, the first of these “Gentile” encounters is with the Samaritan woman.

We go from an encounter (Nicodemus)

in which Jesus reveals the necessity to be born of water and the Spirit  
to an encounter (Samaritan woman)

in which Jesus reveals the necessity to worship in Spirit and in truth.

**Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, just his disciples), he left Judea and returned to Galilee.**

**He had to pass through Samaria.**

**So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat there at the well. It was about noon.**

**A woman of Samaria came to draw water.**

**Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."**

**His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.**

**The Samaritan woman said to him,**

**"How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"**

**(For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)**

**Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him**

**and he would have given you living water."**

**(The woman) said to him,**

**"Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep;  
where then can you get this living water?  
Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern  
and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?"**

**Jesus answered and said to her,  
"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again;  
but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst;  
the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water  
welling to eternal life."**

**The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may  
not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."**

**Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband and come back."**

**The woman answered and said to him, "I do not have a husband."**

**Jesus answered her, "You are right in saying,  
'I do not have a husband.'  
For you have had five husbands,  
and the one you have now is not your husband.  
What you have said is true."**

**The woman said to him, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.  
Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain;  
but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem."**

**Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming  
when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain  
nor in Jerusalem.  
You people worship what you do not understand;  
we worship what we understand,  
because salvation is from the Jews.  
But the hour is coming, and is now here,  
when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth;  
and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.  
God is Spirit, and those who worship him  
must worship in Spirit and truth."**

**The woman said to him,  
"I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed;  
when he comes, he will tell us everything."**

**Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking with you."  
At that moment his disciples returned,  
and were amazed that he was talking with a woman,  
but still no one said, "What are you looking for?" or  
"Why are you talking with her?"**

**The woman left her water jar  
and went into the town and said to the people,  
"Come see a man who told me everything I have done.  
Could he possibly be the Messiah?"**

Jesus passes through Samaria, a region in which obviously live Samaritans, whose origin is difficult to pinpoint, but suffice it to say, considered by the Jews, to be non-Jews.

Jesus comes upon Jacobs' well.

It is an unusual place for encounter.

Did not Jacob meet Rachel at the same place....? (Genesis 29)

At any rate, Jesus is alone.

It is the first time, since they were initially called, that the Apostles are not with Jesus.

Why? Their presence was not an issue with previous encounters.

Such is not the case with this woman Jesus is about to encounter.

Most of the apostles were not very refined.

In their presence,

this woman would surely not have opened her mouth, not a peep.

And so, Jesus sends the apostles to Whole Foods.

Interestingly, Jesus awaits their departure, and thus to be alone, to be tired, to let himself experience fatigue.

Jesus *chooses* fatigue. Fatigue does not simply befall him.

With the Apostles, fatigue would have served little purpose.

Here, however, he is about to encounter a woman who is *exhausted*—exhausted in her body and exhausted in her heart.

Jesus chooses to be tired so to be close to her.

Jesus *sits* at the well.

Jesus adopts a position for rest

but also a position that is less imposing/intimidating for a first encounter.

It is noon, high noon, when the sun beats most intensely

(when we are told to avoid direct sun so to avoid skin damage!).

And here comes this woman.

Her daily routine is to fetch water at the hottest time of day (Galilee is *hot*).

Her daily routine, however, is not her only burden.

Her heart, as will be revealed, is laden with burden.

And her inner burden probably makes her labor all the worse:

no joy, just going through the motions.

When do we go through the motions?

When our heart is not in what we do.

As the state of her heart, later revealed, suggests:

this woman's heart is not in what she is doing.

And so she is not well disposed to meeting anyone.

And yet Jesus awaits her.

Jesus takes the initiative.

Given her burden, given the heaviness of her heart,

she probably would not have addressed Jesus.

Given the barriers of religion and gender,

she probably would not have addressed Jesus.

Jesus wants to encounter this woman.

And so what is his opening line?

It is an unusual introduction: “Give me a drink.”

It is not exactly a line to put a stranger at ease.

It is not exactly a line designed to charm.

Why this approach?

Jesus wants to encounter this woman

where she is “dying” to be encountered.

This woman represents humanity in its despair, in its tired heart.

“Give me a drink.” How did Jesus say this?

He surely said it with a tone and in such a way as to awaken this woman.

She was numb. Jesus needed to touch her deeply. “Give me a drink.”

How does she react? She is amazed.

And amazed means both surprised and touched.

She is amazed at this young, strong, beautiful man who would speak to her.

Her surprised reaction suggests that she was not offended—which suggests

- that Jesus did not speak condescendingly
- that Jesus did not speak an order.

Jesus *asked* her for a drink

—he who deliberately comes without the means to fetch water himself.

This suggests that, in a sense, Jesus even *begs* her.

Why “beg”?

So that she feel safe, and more properly

- so to teach her to ask
- so that she ask
- so that Jesus be able to give.

Her routine and resignation have led to numbness

which stifles curiosity and hinders desire and thus asking.

If nothing is happening in our hearts, we desire nothing and we ask nothing.

She is amazed that Jesus would so freely disregard  
the interdict to associate with Samaritans.

She is amazed,

not because Jesus proves to be some free-wheeling revolutionary

but because Jesus proves to be unbelievably focused on her person.

Jesus reveals how “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10)

and how “mercy triumphs over judgment”.

Jesus reveals also how loves grants freedom to break with unloving customs.

She expresses her amazement.

If only we could hear the tone with which she speaks.

My guess is that, although amazed, she speaks matter-of-factly.

She does not embark on an adventure to get to know Jesus.

But she is curious, and Jesus makes use of the opening in her heart.

The slight awakening is enough for Jesus.

He speaks of the gift of God,

and how she would be asking for a drink if only she knew who he was,

and how he would give living water

—all the while without a bucket to fetch water.

That is a lot. If this does not amaze her even more, nothing will.

She is indeed amazed. The fact that she continues the interaction is a sign.

But she can not let go too quickly.

So she does a “Nicodemus”

and underscores the human illogicality and impossibility of what Jesus says.

She tries to “one-up” Jesus. “Sir, you do not even have a bucket.”

They are at such different levels!

Jesus is talking about living water and she is talking about a bucket.

There is, in her wonder, a note of incredulity, of disbelief.

After all, Jesus’ claim is quite unusual.

What on earth is “living water”?

Water is never living.

Water sustains life but it is not alive.

And so, she hides behind a second superiority.

She has a bucket, and she has the great tradition of the Samaritans:

the well was given to them by Jacob, their spiritual father.

How does Jesus respond?

He does not deny her—albeit relative—superiority.

He does not say “Oh yeah, well, watch this!”

Jesus instead sympathizes with her daily burden.

“Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again.”

—to which she probably interiorly responded “And how!”.

And from this place of sympathy, Jesus draws a contrast again,

revealing the gift he brings.

Jesus again awakens amazement.

Jesus gives living water (whatever that is!)

- which becomes a spring in us
- which makes of us springs of water.

How can she not want this?

It means the end of her daily labor.

She indeed expresses her want: “Sir give me this water.”

She is not requesting the water because she understands what it is,  
but because Jesus has made it irresistible

and quite simply because it means that her labor will be over.

In other words, it means retirement!

She does not really know what she is asking.

But all that matters to Jesus is that there be a desire.

This is *very* important to keep in mind for ourselves...

Jesus knows that she has not understood

—which is important to keep in mind.

What follows is so that she might understand.

The strange way in which Jesus proceeds

will lead her to want the gift more and to begin to grasp what the gift is.

Jesus said to her “Go call your husband and come back.”

“Uh, excuse me: what is the connection?”

Why is Jesus telling her to fetch her husband,

especially knowing the awkwardness and the delicateness of her situation?

FYI: when I read this, I do not have visions of Jesus as a wonderful doctor.

I envision Jesus sticking his finger in the wound,

then moving his finger around and asking “Does that hurt?”

What Jesus actually does is humble her.

Jesus puts her in a vulnerable position

- that her desire might actually intensify
- that she might in fact request more.

Jesus gets her to open the wound in her heart

- that he might penetrate there
- that he might pour living water there.

Jesus never forces himself on us,

but he can strategically and mercifully create conditions

favoring the opening to him of our wounds.

This is indeed how we are healed:

letting Jesus gaze mercifully upon that at which we have difficulty looking.

There very well could have been a profound silence at this moment.

She then expresses how she has indeed been gazed upon mercifully.

“Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.”

A prophet reads hearts, but such reading is not indiscrete voyeurism.

It is merciful gazing which makes one feel safe.

She encounters Jesus as prophet, whom she can trust.

The encounter sets her free to unveil a second deeper wound.

She has been freed and can not but see another anguish of heart that is hers,

anguish regarding an even deeper love:

- the love of worship

- the love inherent to worship.

Love for God is necessarily deeper.

The Samaritan woman no longer worships, caught in this liturgical dispute.

Jesus takes hold of her in her dilemma

and introduces her into deeper worship, deeper adoration,

and in so doing re-gives her direction.

Adoration, i.e. bowing before God in love, gives us direction,

gives us the truest and deepest direction in our lives.

When you experience anxiety, or sadness, or confusion,

and are wondering where you are headed, *adore*.

Jesus gives us the love to do so,

living water that becomes a spring within us.

What does Jesus respond?

He begins, interestingly, by acknowledging

that the true tradition comes from the Jews, not the Samaritans.

The Samaritans broke away from the Jews.

**You people worship what you do not understand;**

**we worship what we understand,**

**because salvation is from the Jews** (verse 22)

“We” signifies Jesus linked to the apostles linked to the Jews.

This does not mean however that she, as a Samaritan, is excluded.

Jesus is not taking sides.

The fact that he does not linger on the issue suggests this.

He reveals that, in the end, it is neither here nor there,

for he comes to introduce into deeper more intimate worship.

He calls her “woman”. How seemingly rude.  
He actually appeals to her human dignity  
and her capacity to love  
which he comes to transform by giving her living water.

“The hour is coming and is now here,  
when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth.”  
In other words, the anointed, the word made flesh, is present,  
enabling and presenting adorers to the Father.  
Adorers who recognize he is spirit.  
This does not simply mean supra-physical but the breath of love.  
This suggests the fitting way to adore is in the Holy Spirit with all that we  
are.

**v. 25 The woman said to him I know that the messiah is coming.  
The one called the anointed. When he comes,  
he will tell us everything.**

What Jesus reveals regarding worship awakens hunger and thirst in her.  
And then Jesus satisfies her hunger and quenches her thirst.

**v.26 Jesus said to her, “I am He, the one who is speaking with you.”**

**v.27 At that moment his disciples return,  
and were amazed that he was talking with a women,  
but still no one said “What are you seeking?” or  
“Why are you talking with her?”**

The disciples return but do not say a word of their surprise  
that Jesus is talking with a woman.

They at least have some sense of a sacred happening  
and that this encounter transcends their comprehension.

v. 28 **The woman left her water jar and went into the town  
and said to the people “Come see a man who told me everything  
I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?”**

The woman goes, leaving behind her water jar, her bucket,

- her *raison d’etre*
- her one area of control
- what she has something going for herself.

How amazing: love sets us free. It no longer matters to her.

Prior to meeting Jesus had anyone tried to take her water jar, her bucket,  
she probably would have been ferocious.

Now, she has found meaning, she has found love  
and the bucket is so secondary...

What is this living water which Jesus gives? It is water linked to its source.

In this case, we are speaking of divine love which

- becomes a spring in us
- enables us to love even when our hearts have been broken  
(7 husbands) and to worship God in spirit and in truth.

It is love linked to the Holy Spirit.

Such love therefore is endless and quenches the thirst of our hearts.

And such love is given—as suggested—

such that we become springs of water

- for God in adoration
- for one another in fraternal love, awakening one another's hearts.

Divine love is a direct participation in the Holy Spirit.