



The Third Sunday of Lent (A)
March 15, 2020
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

One of my favorite contemporary theologians wrote the following about today's Gospel passage: The woman at the well "is able to ask for what Jesus has to offer rather than question the possibility (4:15). She is not certain that Jesus is the Christ... but she does not let that stop her from leaving behind her water jar, going into the city, and inviting the people to their own encounter with Jesus... The woman at the well shows us that faith is about dialogue, about growth and change. It is not about having all the answers..."

(Karoline Lewis at http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=44)

In today's Gospel, one of my favorite passages in Scripture, Jesus opened a door for the woman at Jacob's Well. The woman kept the door open to possibilities in her encounter with Jesus. Jesus invites us to do the same.

Today's story is found only in the Gospel of John and not in the other three Gospels. Why? Perhaps because by the time of its writing near the end of the First Century, the Gospel of Jesus was well on its way to the world.

Today's story represents an encounter, a theological teaching, proclamation to others and an illumination. The woman at the well encountered Jesus and was brought to faith. Apart from this story, we know nothing about her.

Unlike Nicodemus in the previous passage from John's Gospel which we heard last week, we are not even given the woman's name. Her encounter with Jesus was not at night but the day. Her encounter with Jesus is even more startling, however, because she was a Samaritan, a population in the Northern Kingdom of Israel which was part Jew and part Gentile. They had their own Temple, their own Torah and different laws governing life. Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with one another. (https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_1319.cfm)

Nicodemus and the woman were contrasting characters with different backgrounds and encounters with Jesus at different times representing night and day. I believe they symbolize potential aspects of our faith. Both Nicodemus and the woman at Jacob's Well were in search of the same thing, light to illumine their paths in life.

Who among us can truthfully say that we walk in the light of Jesus at all times in our lives? Who among us doesn't experience times of darkness or perhaps times in which the light is obscured by the challenges or even roadblocks of life? Who would not admit that life has been upended by the Coronavirus and the world is suffering? Who can really say that faith is smooth-sailing each and every day and that there are never times of doubt?

I believe we are praying this morning to help ensure that times of doubt are as few as possible. I recognize that today we need prayer and 'lots of it'!

I believe we are eager to be nourished and fed by the Word of God in Scripture. We believe that God's Word is true and leads and guides us in the midst of denials, falsehoods and contradictions so prevalent today in our world today.

I believe we long to experience comfort in the midst of ever-growing tensions surrounding the Coronavirus and its impact on our nation, our community and each of us. We have temporarily suspended in-person life at St. Mark's in response to those tensions and recommendations from the National Church, the Diocese and State Government but our life of prayer together continues.

As people of faith, we pray to God who calls us to experience life-giving water, a call which is stronger than a cup of coffee and a newspaper at Starbucks or Biggby's. God opens a door to faith and beacons to "come and see". For some of us that is a relatively easy. For others, faith is a 'yet to be' fully-realized reality.

The woman at the well represents an encounter that changed her life. Jesus was already at the well. She somehow had the courage to approach him and to dialogue with him. She had the courage to suggest that it was she who had a tool for him to draw the well water.

In her practical wisdom, the Samaritan woman, an outsider to accepted Jewish traditions, recognized that Jesus was without a bucket. Her bucket, then, became a catalyst for further dialogue. The woman experienced and embraced a new reality and then shared with others.

Jesus met the woman at the well where she was in life. Jesus meets us where we are in life. Jesus doesn't demand preconditions for dialogue and relationship. He offers us an encounter, a life-changing encounter, and one which can only take root if we are open to it, embrace it and make it our own.

Sometimes in our journey of faith, we encounter more questions than answers, at least, I do. There many questions without answers this past week as we discerned what that the current epidemic would mean for us at St. Marks!

Even in times of questioning, God is with us. In these difficult times of questions in our lives, can we see God at work in the questions as well as in the sought-out answers. God is in the darkness of life, the shadows of life, and in the light of life. God's grace permeates all of creation and is open to all of us without exception.

Today, we can be grateful for God's faithfulness to us and God's on-going love and care for us. Today, we can be grateful for the communications, guidelines and recommendations to do our best to mitigate the spread of the Corona Virus. Perhaps, we might ask God to help us discover what we are to learn about this daunting experience facing us in life.

Pray with me if you will: O God, you are faithful, and your faithfulness is great. Thank you for encountering us where we are in life, embracing us and offering you self to us in Jesus. Give us clarity and strength to face the challenges before us with wisdom, courage and perseverance. Amen.