

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink.' (For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans)" (John 4:7-9).

All throughout the Old Testament there lies the hope of the Messiah. Beginning with Genesis 3:15, the Hebrew Scriptures repeatedly proclaim that the Savior is coming.

Generation after generation, Jews became familiar with these Scripture passages proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. And they took God's promise of the Messiah to heart. They waited eagerly for their coming Savior. And their sense of expectation only increased as centuries passed.

This sense of expectation was not just among the Jews, but also among the Samaritans who also eagerly awaited the Messiah.

But as both the Jews and Samaritans eagerly awaited the coming Savior, the Jews and Samaritans weren't exactly on speaking terms with one another. So, it would be highly irregular to ever see a Jew having a conversation with a Samaritan. But that is exactly what Jesus does in today's Gospel lesson from John 4.

"Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself did not baptize, but only His disciples), He left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria" (John 4:1-4).

But the thing is, Jesus and His disciples didn't have to pass through Samaria. Although the road through Samaria was shorter than the coastal road or the road on the east side of the Jordan, the Jewish disdain for the Samaritans would often lead them to avoid Samaria altogether. Instead of traveling through Samaria, Jews preferred to be defiled by a lesser evil, as they would pass through the Gentile region of Perea. And then, they would cross back into Galilee north of Samaria. This was the usual route. But Jesus chose to travel through Samaria.

However, Jesus didn't choose to go this way to save time, He chose this route to go through Samaria because He had to. This was His mission. As St. Paul was inspired to write in our Epistle today: ***“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ... God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”*** (Romans 5:6, 8). Jesus is on the mission to save sinners.

So, as Jesus traveled north toward Galilee, ***“He came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there”*** (John 4:5-6).

As Jesus sat beside the well in the heat of the day, tired and thirsty from His journey, there came a woman from Samaria to draw water. This was an odd sight for it was the cool of the evening when women would customarily perform the chore of fetching water. This woman came at high noon. The worst of all times to fetch water. Even more unusual is that this woman came such a long distance to this well when there were other sources of water closer to the village. For some reason, she would rather walk the extra distance in the hottest time of the day.

Jesus says to her, ***“Give Me a drink”*** (John 4:7). This astonished the woman as this was a shocking breach of social custom. Men did not speak with women in public – not even their wives. And even more significant is that Jews wanted nothing to do with Samaritans. But Jesus asks this woman, ***“Give Me a drink.”***

Taken aback, she says to Jesus, ***“How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?”*** (John 4:9). And even more odd is that Jesus had no water pot. For He is asking to drink from her water pot, which would ceremonially defile Himself by drinking from the vessel of an unclean Samaritan.

Again, there had been a bitter rivalry between the Jews and the Samaritans for centuries. This rivalry began when the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken over by the Assyrians and most of the Israelites who remained intermarried which formed a mixed race known as the Samaritans. The new settlers brought their idolatrous religion with them, which then became intermingled with the worship of Yahweh. In time, the Samaritans abandoned their idols and worshiped Yahweh alone, but only after their own fashion. Instead of accepting the entirety of the Torah, the Samaritans only accepted the five books of Moses, known as the Pentateuch, as their canonical Scripture and they chose to worship God only on Mount Gerizim, not at the temple in Jerusalem.

And things only got worse after the Southern Kingdom of Judah returned from their Babylonian exile. You see, under Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews first priority was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. At this same time, the Samaritans professed their loyalty to Yahweh and they offered assistance in rebuilding the temple. However, the Jews bluntly refused their offer, which only further divided the peoples. Then later, the Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple upon Mount Gerizim during the intertestamental period, which only further worsened relations between them.

After centuries of mistrust, there was a deep animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. In fact, the worst insult a Jew could make of a fellow Jew would be to call that person a Samaritan, as the Jewish authorities often called Jesus. The Samaritans certainly reciprocated the Jewish hostility as is seen in Luke 9 when a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, since Jesus was heading to Jerusalem.

So, here is Jesus – *a Jew* – doing the unthinkable. He is conversing with a woman from Samaria. Jesus is shattering barriers.

This woman came to fetch water in the heat of the day. We soon find out why. Jesus says to her, ***“Go, call your husband, and come here”*** (John 4:16). She then attempts to conceal her sin, but He knows. She says, ***“I have no husband”*** (John 4:17). Jesus then commends her for her truthfulness, but unmask her sin, saying, ***“You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true”*** (John 4:18).

Here, Jesus is commending this woman for refusing to call the man she’s now “playing house” with as not her husband, because living together does not constitute a marriage, since God only views marriage as a formal, legal and public covenant between a man and a woman.

Now, we don’t know the circumstances of her five marriages, plus her current roommate, but Jesus’ silent implication is that she is not innocent. For Jesus knows that these broken relationships are manifestations of her broken relationship with God.

This brokenness is what St. Paul spoke of in our Epistle. This Samaritan woman is “weak,” and even worse: she is ungodly, still a sinner, and an enemy of God. And by our sinful nature, we are just like her. This woman knows a lot about broken relationships. She doesn’t appear to have much peace. This is why she is coming to the well at the heat of the day, so she can avoid hearing the not-so-friendly chit-chat of the other women of the town directed toward her.

This Samaritan woman at the well is desperate. And without her own wisdom or strength, she has come to the right place: Jacob's well.

Jesus says to her, ***“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”*** (John 4:13-14). In her desperation for peace, she says, ***“Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water”*** (John 4:15).

Throughout Scripture, the well is a place to find marriage. Rebekah's routine trip to a well led to marriage with Isaac. Jacob met Rachel at a well. Moses met Zipporah at a well.

Here, at Jacob's well, Jesus is offering this woman “living water.” But this water isn't what this woman is expecting. She is expecting a watery refreshment. But what Jesus is giving is even better. Jesus is proposing to her the forgiveness of her sins to which He will succeed in doing through giving up His life for His bride, the Church, and raising His body again. Though she was an enemy of God, Jesus has committed His life to her and to you and me.

Jesus has come into the world to give us “living water.” And we receive His “living water” in Holy Baptism, in the absolution, and through communing with Him. He is the One who gives living water, so that you will never thirst. He is the One who knows you for you are and loves you all the way to the cross and death.

Although we want to hide our wrongs, our faults, our failings, our shame, Jesus sees our entire mess. He sees your every sin. But like the Samaritan woman in today's reading, Jesus doesn't care how dark your life may be, but He comes to seek us out in order to bring us to repentance, so that He can forgive us and make us His.

After centuries of waiting for the Savior, the Savior has come! Jesus the Christ has come to restore His bride – the Church! He offers us His Means of Grace! So, come, receive the gift of “living water” through Christ's very body and blood given and shed for you – for the forgiveness of your sins! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +