

3rd Sunday in Lent, February 24, 2008, 2nd Baptist Church; Robert C. Molby, Interim Pastor

The church continues its series of close encounters of Jesus with (in order) Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the man born blind, and Lazarus (and his two sisters). Or to put it another way, these are "encounters" with our need for rebirth, our thirst, our blindness, and death.

Exodus 17:1-7, Water from the Rock

1) From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages as the LORD (*Yahweh*) commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2) The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD (*Yahweh*)?" 3) But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" 4) So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5) The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go, 6) I will be standing there in front of you on the rock of Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7) He called the place Massah (*Test*) and Meribah (*Quarrel*), because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD (*Yahweh*) among us or not?"

Exodus 16, Bread from heaven; complaining

Exodus 17, been there done that.

- Complaint against Moses interpreted as a complaint against God
- Basis of the complaint is a lack of faith
- Moses was more happy leading sheep than he was these people!
- People think they will die of hunger; Moses think die from the people

- Situations of crisis tend to break down community, or cause community "neighbors" to turn on one another.
- God's response; God graciously and faithfully responds not to the people's characteristic lack of faith, but to their characteristic human needs. Because God is faithful, God responds out of grace and love.
- Moreover, God does so in a manner that provides not simply for the physical need, but in a way that restores the community! Previously, working through Moses, God had caused bread (which normally grows out of the ground) to rain down from heaven. Here, working through Moses, God causes water, which often rains down from heaven) to spring forth from the earth. By working through Moses, the community is restored even as the people's bodily needs are met.
- It is not the people of Israel who were stiff necked, hard hearted, and characteristically lacking in faith. It is all of us. It is not just the people of Israel whose community was threatened by their characteristic infidelity. It is true of our communities, too. It is not merely the ancient Israelites who complained against God. We do so also—and, in fact, the psalms of lament not only give us permission to take such complaining prayers on our lips; they even go so far as to authorize such complaining prayers as a proper dimension of faith. To borrow a phrase from Psalm 51, this story, along with the psalms of lament, "open our lips that our mouths may complain to God."
- Above all, this story bears witness to the faithfulness and graciousness of God. The entire Book of Exodus is about the faithfulness of God. This is the message of Exodus, from the report in 2:23-25, that God heard the people's groaning in Egypt and remembered the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the creedal hymn that is sung in Exodus 34:6: "The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

John 4:5-42, Woman of Samaria

(Dramatize reading this text by having other people read parts for the characters in the story. Someone be the narrator, another Jesus, another person the Samaritan Woman, a group be the disciples and still another group the Samaritans.)

An important part of the text, verses 10-18:

10) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11) The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12) Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13) Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14) but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." 15) The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

16) Jesus to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17) The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18) for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

A conversation that should never have taken place

- Jews have no dealings with Samaritans; Jesus knew this. The Samaritans and the Jews were like cousins and each had nothing to do with the other; especially the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans. Jesus abhors (hates) that spirit within us that condemns other people just because they may be of a different race, a different religion, different politics, and so forth. In fact that is what this story is all about. The author of John is saying that the best way to break down such animosity is in face to face conversations with those who you are ostracizing. Like meeting face to face with Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, and so forth. You cannot really make a lot of progress without sharing water from the same well, so to speak.
- Jesus is at the well first, sitting alone and it is noon time;
- The woman approaches and she should not have come alone
 - ✓ Women usually came together to draw water
 - ✓ This woman was a polygamist in addition to being a Samaritan

- Jews and Samaritans never share anything with one another, not even conversation
- Jesus is not concerned about what people might think if he is seen talking to this woman.
- The disciples know that a meeting between Jesus and this woman should not have happened; Verse 27, Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" The disciples were Jews, just as Jesus was, and they were steeped in the ostracizing of the Samaritans but Jesus could rise above that ostracizing, they could not.
- This begs the question, "Can you and I rise above our ostracizing of minorities, of different religions, of different kinds of worship, and so forth?"

Notice the content of the conversation

- Jesus speaks first and requests a drink. He does not have the equipment to draw water from the well – no bucket or a rope long enough (verse 11), but the woman does have (verse 28); at least a water jar to put the water in.
- She wants to know why he, a Jew, is asking her to help him because, historically, the Jews and Samaritans do not share anything with one another (verse 9).
- Jesus tells her that he knows something she does not know, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is speaking to you, you would ask him and he would have given you living water.
- At first, like Nicodemus, she takes the words of Jesus literally. "You do not have a bucket and the well is deep. You need a long rope. Who do you think you are? Are you greater than Jacob, our ancestor, who gave us the well?" And truly Jesus is greater than Jacob. He can supply the living water whereas Jacob could not.
- There is another contrast here; Jacob has an impeccable set of credentials whereas this woman has no credentials yet she is getting water from his well!
- Jesus explains further, like he did to Nicodemus, what it is that he means. "The water in the well satisfies physical thirst for the time being. But you get thirsty again and have

to come back for more water. The kind of water I am referring to, living water; is like a spring of water within you. It keeps on coming and you never get thirsty in the sense you get thirsty for this well water. The water that I will give you will become...a spring of water gushing up to eternal life?

- The woman grasps something here that is beyond her understanding but it is something for which she thirsts. She may not fully understand it but she believes Jesus can supply that kind of water. "Sir," she says, "Give me this water." Now she is asking Jesus for water whereas Jesus started the conversation by asking her for water.
- Do we not think that those who we ostracize do not long for understanding? God help us to overcome this animosity.
- She shows though, that she does not fully understand the nature of what Jesus is saying because she continues with, "So that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water (verse 15)."
- Jesus then calls for confession. He says, "Go call your husband." (Confession is important in our worship. We must confess our wrongdoings before we can make a confession of Christ. The call to pray in our worship bulletin is actually a call to confession. We are exploring that theme next Wednesday night during our regular Bible Study time. Actually the Diaconate has called for the last Wednesday night's Bible Study time to be a Prayer Time. I invite you to come and experience a time of confession.)
- The woman makes her confession. "I have no husband," she says.
- Jesus accepts her confession and says, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" God has endowed Jesus with special powers to know what is going on in the human heart.
- God knows all the alleged sins of the Samaritan past and yet there is full acceptance despite full knowledge.
- Even though Jesus knows all about us, inside and out, he still accepts us if we are willing to be honest with him. What is it that Jesus knows about you that no one else knows?

- Jesus is a reconciler of ancient enemies. From what we know of Jesus the ancient schism between Jews and Samaritans struck him as being all wrong. Those schisms that you and I have with one another, or with whomever, are all wrong in Jesus' eyes as well. We can trust Him to make things right no matter how bad we think it might be.
- Now she begins to engage in theological discussion about worship. She basically is asking where people ought to worship. The Jews say that in Jerusalem at the Temple is the place to worship. The Samaritans worshiped on a mountain that is within sight of them. Jesus replies that the time is coming when people will worship God in Spirit and in Truth. God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.
- Jesus identifies himself to the woman as the Christ of God and she doesn't take time to draw water and take it back to the village. She goes back immediately and invites her people to come to Jesus at the well.
- The Samaritans do come and they believe because of two things: what the woman told them and because they heard him for themselves.
- I hope you hear the words we say about Jesus but I also hope that in your heart of hearts you hear him for yourselves and then you will believe!

Collect for the Day (Common Order, page 661)

Almighty God, You give the water of eternal life through Jesus Christ your Son.

May we always thirst for you, the spring of life and source of goodness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen