

SERMON - SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2015

(Reading - John 4: Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman)

4 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.^[a])

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹³ "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet."²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

³⁵ Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour."

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world." This is the word of God.

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The text verse for the sermon is verse 42: They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."

Hearsay is part of our everyday living. It is everywhere, in our churches, at work, in everyday village life. It is even part of our family lives. No wonder the courts of law reject any "hearsay" as a proof of evidence. It was no different in Jesus' day.

Our reading starts off with the rumours that the Pharisees were spreading that Jesus baptised more people than John the Baptist. Hearsay, Chinese whispers, call it what you want, often portrayed as the "truth". I mean these rumours from the religious leaders could cause Jesus' fall from honour to being shameful. But Jesus did not react, not at this moment. He decided to travel away from these rumours, which is quite ironic, in the sense that his forthcoming behaviour would cause even more rumours by his people.

So Jesus went north. Instead of going the preferred longer way to Galilee from Judea, he decided to take the shorter, direct route through Samaria.

Now the Samaritans were the enemies of the Jews. The Jews regarded them as unholy and unclean. They were the Jews that married into other cultures. They had their own holy place namely Mount Gerizim while the Jews believed that the temple in Jerusalem was the ONLY place where God was.

So Jesus came to Jacob's well near a Samaritan town. This well faced the Holy Mountain of the Samaritans namely Mount Gerizim. It was noon and the hottest time of day. Jesus sat down and as an after- thought we learn that his disciples went into town to buy food.

Then a nameless Samaritan woman came to the well to get some water. Jesus spoke to her and asked her if she could provide him with water. This was unheard of in Jesus' day for a man to speak to a woman. It could have been perceived as flirting, or even starting an affair which was punishable with the death penalty. It was even more shameful to speak to a "gentile" or an unclean person like a Samaritan woman.

She responds by drawing clear cultural boundary lines by saying that Jesus' conduct is not appropriate as He is a Jew and she a Samaritan. Jesus then says to her that if she realises who He is, and she asks him, He will give her life-giving water. She then says that He cannot give her life-giving water as He has no means to take water from the well.

Jesus answers her by saying that the water He will give her is different. Whoever drinks from this water will never be thirsty again. This water will be like a spring that provides life giving water and will give eternal life. She then responds for the first time positively by saying that she wants to drink from this life giving water.

Jesus then confronts her personal life. He says to her that she must go and call her husband. She admits that she does not have a husband. In fact Jesus reveals to her that He knows that she had 5 men and was now living with a man. No wonder she came to the well all alone, in the heat of the day. When we hear her confession, we can almost understand her reluctance to meet with the other women at the well, to come at a time when no other women would confront her with all the rumours, the "hear say" or the Chinese whispers, why she was deliberately staying out of the way of the other women. But Jesus confronts and exposes her real character, by confirming her truth and giving her some form of dignity back.

It was now clear to her that Jesus was a prophet. The Samaritans also expected a Messiah, someone bigger than Moses. Jesus then revealed to her that He is the One – He is the expected Messiah.

She left her water jar at the well. This is quite important suggesting that she does not need water anymore, since Jesus gave her the living water. And because of His living water, she had the courage to go and face all the people she was hiding from, telling them about Jesus. His words filled her life and

indeed became a well in her. She could not stop talking and providing others with the living water.

And then as the woman walks away, Jesus talks with his disciples and tells them that the harvest is ready. They must go out and gather the Harvest.

The Samaritans in that town came to faith through the witness of the nameless and marginalized woman. And they professed that they believed not because of hearsay, not because of Chinese whispers or rumours, but because they met Jesus themselves. His living water flowed from the woman to them. They all drank from it and they were all freed from their own prejudices towards each other, the Jews and Jesus.

What is the message for us?

Jesus still meets people in different places. He meets you and me here in Sunday worship. He meets us each and every time we talk to God and read from His word, the Bible. He meets us in hospitals, in sitting rooms, in bus stops, in refugee camps, in crematoriums, in buses and when we drive home from work. He meets us when we come to Him like the nameless woman who was despised and ignored; He meets us when we have no other way to go. He embraces us when we are alone and gives us hope. He comes to us in the middle of long nights of crying over a loved one that is gone and wipes away our tears. He comes to us and holds our hands when we are left speechless and alone. He even comes to people who do not have faith – and sometimes He uses us to reach out to them. He still comes to us...the question is, do we recognise Him?

He changed the nameless Samaritan woman's life forever. He changed the lives of many Samaritans in that village. He changed our lives forever, when He died for our sins. He gave us all the living water of Hope that we are free to drink from. The woman drank from it and it saved her life. She could taste the difference, no longer stale water, water filled with bacteria and viruses, but pure living water! She discovered the Christ, the Saviour, she understood that He had set her free of her past. He enabled her to worship God in a true way – not bound to a historical place and ritual – but in spirit and truth.

If you are sitting in this Church this morning and you have a dark past which you try to hide away, if you are sitting in this Church and you feel like a prisoner because of your own personal circumstances, if you are sitting in

this Church and resisting the power of God to change you, God is telling you that you are important to Him.

All that you need to do is to drink from His well, the living water, believing that He is also your Lord and Saviour. Do not hide away from Him or other people, tell God about your life and ask Him to change your past and help you to embrace your future to walk with Him.

It took the woman a while to get it. Maybe it simply sounded just too good to be true. We can't blame her. We would probably have done the same. Jesus, why me? I'm bad! I'm living at the edge of society. I'm a Samaritan of doubtful morals just wanting to mind my own business. Leave me alone! But He didn't.

Today the Lord God met us again at the waters of baptism and He changed the destiny of a wee baby girl Ciara – he gave her a name – His Holy Name is now on her forehead. She is not nameless. She belongs to Him. But God also changed your lives, Raymond and Emma. May you walk from this living water renewed and refreshed, knowing that you are not alone. God will be with you when and wherever you take His hand!

God also changed our lives this morning. When we go out of this Church, we need to go and share His living waters. And let us all encourage each other to drink from the living water – always and forever!

Amen