

A Sermon by The Reverend Deacon Cecily Sawyer Harmon, LCSW
St. Thomas's, Episcopal Church Newark, De. 19711
3rd Sunday in Lent March 19th, 2017 Year A
Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:51-11; John 4:4-42

*May the words of my Mouth and the Mediations of my Heart be
Acceptable to you Lord Christ My Rock and My Redeemer.*

How do I get in? Can I be counted? Am I worthy? Am I the right gender, class, ethnicity, color, sexual orientation? What **is** this living water and am I able to partake? Our Lord has answered these questions in the affirmative many times over in His word, in many examples from his life and in that quiet voice in our hearts. Today, we have an opportunity to revisit one of the more popular texts which addresses these questions in today's Gospel on the Samaritan Woman. Let us see if the Lord has a fresh word for this season.

Several thoughts came to mind as I was rereading the Old Testament scriptures in today's lesson while drinking very thirstily the first of usually, for me is 3 to 4 bottles of water daily. Water is the essence of life. We are composed of mostly water—50-60%. We live in water in the womb before we come into the world. Plants need water to germinate and grow. Animals need water to live. In fact all living creatures must have water to survive. I

thought about how precious water is and how so many of God's children do not have clean water and certainly can't turn on a faucet to obtain it. I try and remember not to let water just run while I am brushing my teeth, a small thing I admit, but an opportunity to think about those who do not have water so readily available. I have been in countries where I have witnessed people who do not have running water. And I have been in countries where you cannot drink the water. The absence of water or difficulties on getting water defines the lives of people who must deal with these problems. It's difficult for us to imagine what it is like to have to walk to a well, or stream; to walk miles to get water, just for that day, for the necessities, some for drinking, some for cooking, some for cleaning, some for bathing. But laundry day, press the imagination. If we cannot simply go downstairs to the washer or drive to a laundromat, can you imagine the production? The planning, the physical work? Can you also imagine how women, to whom it often falls the work of caring for children, preparing food, managing household affairs—how would women who must complete these chores respond to the challenges of collecting water? Might they choose certain times? Perhaps go to the water source in groups for safety and socializing? If collecting and using water is not a private but a public

practice, how might that change how we feel about water, the source of water, and our neighbors?

Today's Gospel begins in the afternoon on a probably very hot and dry day. Our Lord is tired and thirsty from his travels, he sees a well, and sits to rest. He notices a woman. There is something wrong with this picture. What is a woman doing at the well in the afternoon? The women go to the well in the morning when it is cool. Early in the morning before the heat of the day, the crush of responsibilities at home, when they can socialize with their friends and experience the relative safety of travelling in groups. Getting water at the local well during Jesus' life was a social, public practice. Therefore, we can infer that this woman has been ostracized from her people. She is not well thought of for some reason or set of reasons and not permitted to be among the other "Good People"

When Jesus asks her to give him a drink she is shocked. She correctly recognizes Jesus as a Jew and assumes he shares the antipathy between Jews and Samaritans, as a consequence of which contact between Jews and Samaritans was strictly prohibited. Jesus is a rebel whose guiding principle is love. In this story, once again Jesus, in the name of love breaches several social barriers. He is speaking to a woman in public who is a Samaritan. He

knows that this woman coming here at this time is a signal of her disgrace. So he is not just talking to someone with whom he should not speak because of his religion but also because of her lack of social status. Unconcerned Jesus engages her in conversation. Within short order, the conclusions which Jesus and contemporary people who heard or heard about this story would have come to are revealed. The woman has been ostracized by her community. In fact, though Jesus asks her for water, it was she, who needed the restoring love and acceptance that only connection with her source could provide. Jesus offers the woman refreshment better than the water he asks of her.

Standing at the well, Jesus and the woman have a very lengthy discussion. In fact, this is the longest recorded conversation with anyone. To Jesus, she was worthy! In the eyes of our Lord and savior, she was so important, He was willing to spend as much time as needed to connect with her, to see her, to validate her and love her. The Samaritan woman just where she was, who she was, with all of her experiences, her reduced social status, her ethnicity all of the things that “should” have been barriers between her and Jesus--nothing mattered, her color her ethnicity, her gender, class, sexuality, history. Nothing. Jesus offered her living water.

Jesus received the woman with such grace and love that she was profoundly

transformed. She had accepted feeling less than and looked down upon by the people of her community, so much so that she accepted going to the well alone at the hottest part of the day. It is the Lord's acceptance of her that emboldens her to leave her water jar and rush to her village to demand that they come and see for themselves this man who might possibly be the Messiah. Jesus' love for her ignited a love for her community! We know that they heard and followed her call and that Jesus stayed with them for two days, many believed because of her testimony and many more believed because of his word.

How can you and I be a witness to our Messiah in our troubled world today? Can we draw a parallel between this familiar Gospel and our community, our country today? We would do well to remember that the well where Jesus and the Samaritan meet is common ground for both of them. Although the Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with one another, their mutual ancestor Jacob built the well, the well were the two found themselves, one thirsty and one with a bucket. Jesus and the Samaritan woman therefore lived in the same physical place though rarely shared the same spaces. Are there people who live in our city, neighborhood, state who practice a different religious faith, different culture, race, ethnicity, class or orientation from you? Have you extended

yourself in Christian love? Have you smiled at the woman wearing a hijab? Have you spoken to your co-worker who you know is from another culture not to interrogate them but just to engage in conversation? Have you tried to listen respectfully to someone who has an experience that you do not understand because you do not share that piece of their identity? Have you chosen to believe them and affirm their right to be here an expression of God's divinity?

Jesus is seeking someone who shares this thirst, His thirst for peace for all mankind. This peace is a thirst for Justice, a thirst for integrity, respect, a thirst for fairness, equality, justice and healing for people, especially for people on the margins. Jesus' thirst was not for some people his thirst was not for a lot of people; His thirst was for ALL people.

What Jesus offered the women at the well is His living water, water that wells up from inside, as pure love. This water is freely and lovingly offered to all of us. Like the Samaritan woman we all come to the well over and over again to draw water. Do we see the man sitting there? Can we hear what he is saying to us? Can we feel what it is like for Jesus to ask us to do something for him?

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman there is something she can do for him. She is able to experience new life because she is able to do something for Jesus by something for others. Are we able to do the same? Are we able to approach others in this way? Can we be as vulnerable as she was in order to receive the healing water from Him in the places where we hurt? Are we willing to show our brokenness to Him? Are we actually ready to be made whole?

We come to the well, here in church week after week and Jesus asks us to drink. He wants us to be free, He knows what we need! He loves each of us so! He has met or will meet our needs just as quickly as we decide to share them with Him. But the question is, do we know the kinds of things for which He thirsts? Yes, we have learned or been reminded that Jesus wants justice for all because he loves each of us equally. We know, so what shall we do now? My brothers and sisters, let us begin by praying fervently for our country. As you pray, ask the Lord to reveal to you the persons or areas which He wants you to enter. When you have decided, commit yourself to carrying the love of Jesus to that person, those people, or that area just as the Samaritan woman carried the good news to her neighbors.

Democrats, Republicans, Liberals and Conservatives who at times are ardent foes, yet sharing the same spiritual ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must also choose to drink the living water of our Lord. We all need to make a full commitment to him. When we place Jesus first, when we think and operate from a place of love, would we not all agree that all people, regardless of their income have accessible good affordable health care? Would we be able to identify other issues—care of and treatment for our veterans, good schools for all children, support for the arts, humane treatment of the imprisoned, respectful, clearly defined rules governing immigrants, care for the environment a sacred trust which we are passing on to our grandchildren and great grandchildren. What are the issues that you share with someone who appears to be so very different from yourself? When you meet, in your place of work, the supermarket, school—your well—what do you have in common which will honor the love of Christ within you and thereby spread the power of his life changing love? Christians must lead this charge to be salt, light and water in our world in the name of Jesus.

Yes. Every single one of us, we are all worthy; we are the right class, gender, ethnicity, origin, color and sexual orientation. The living water that quenches every thirst is for all God's people. Amen?

Amen