

St. Mary's and Trinity Episcopal Churches
March 19, 2017
Year A; 3rd Sunday in Lent
Exodus 17: 1-7
Psalm 95
John 4: 5-42

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Amen.

This story of the Samaritan woman is unusual in the Gospels as we get full and rich details about her encounter with Jesus, as well as the lively dialogue between the 2 of them.

And though the story is, of course, a few thousand years old, if we allow it, the story is vivid and current and speaking directly to each of us.

But before we can we look at how this reading might join us in the year 2017, a few details are needed to clarify the reading.

The first needed detail, Jesus and his friends are traveling through Samaria, the territory between Galilee and Judea, and though the Samaritans were Jews, they were the wrong kind of Jews....old disagreements between these groups had long ago calcified, religious and racial prejudices had formed and had been going for over 700 years by the time Jesus and this woman speak..... Thus a Samaritan was about the worst person you could imagine meeting, if you were Jewish, like Jesus and his friends.

Second, the fact that Jesus has spoken to a woman is shocking enough in that society, but the fact that she is Samaritan and a woman was almost unbelievable in those times; Jewish men and Samaritan women would NEVER have spoken.

Third, the woman has come at noon to draw water, and of course, with the sun blazing overhead, she is the only one there....

She has chosen to come at this deserted hour because she is an outcast in the town, looked down on and gossiped over for those 5 husbands, and now living with a man she is not married to.....

So she does not come at dawn or dusk, as the other women will, to draw water together and have time to visit in the cooler times of day, a social gathering as well as necessary work. No she would rather come in the heat of the day, then risk the looks and whispers of the others.

So, the woman has 3 strikes, Samaritan, female and social outcast..... She has 3 strikes against her....when Jesus chooses her to speak to....

Now, how does this story speak across so many years to challenge each of us in this season of Lent?

First, we need to allow the story to come a bit closer to us....

We might be interested in knowing the history of the Samaritans and the Jews....or to understand gender inequality in the 1st century....

Ok, those are interesting angles, but they keep the story at arm's length, interesting, but not ours.....But just suppose....we wonder for a moment..... who is the Samaritan woman in our lives?

Who has 3 strikes with us, who do we dismiss, who are we sure we know by outward appearances, ethnicity, race, gender....Who gets no chance in our world?

I remember many years ago, in the 1980s, the church I attended hosted a gathering of teenagers from Northern Ireland, an equal number of Catholic and Protestant teens. This truly noble effort invited the teens to travel away from their troubled land, and to live in community for a few weeks and get to know the other, get to know the one they viewed as having 3 or more strikes, the one they had been taught to hate since they were born....

For us, as the American adults, to hear those young people, in their beautiful lilting voices, to hear them speak casually of the hatred they had been taught, from the cradle, was stunning, and to see their young courage to try and walk a new path with each other.....

So in this Lenten season our Gospel asks us each to ponder who we were taught from the cradle to hate, just because of who they were....whether it was an ethnic group or a branch of our own family....

Who is Jesus speaking to at the well in our life, who is the one we dismiss.....and yet Jesus chooses and speaks to and blesses.

Second and finally, this reading pushes us and challenges us further. It does not appear in the season of Lent by chance....To notice the challenge to us we need to hear again the Samaritan woman's words...

"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! (He knows me inside and out!) He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

Imagine now sitting with Jesus and he tells you everything, EVERYTHING you have ever done....since you could walk and talk, until now. Today, Sunday, March 19th 2017....Everything.... We all have 5 husbands somewhere, not literally perhaps.....but 5 mistakes, 5 thoughtless, cruel words, 5 greedy choices, 5 broken places, 5 regrets, 5 retched, embarrassing times....

And then to know that, we, just like the Samaritan woman, are invited to meet Jesus and to realize that he KNIOWS us, that he CAN tells us everything we have ever done....and then, to know too the unspoken part of the woman's testimony.....

"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done"and loves me still.

And in this Lenten season, again we are invited, not required but invited, to go to the well.....And we, like the woman, get to choose, will we simply get our water quickly, ignore the stranger asking us for water, and go on with our days as usual....

It is easier sometimes to live unknown, unforgiven by our God....because if we stay at the well, and offer the water and talk and hear of our 5 retched, broken places.....and receive the fresh cool glorious water of being known, forgiven, and loved by our God.....

Well, then we can't skulk around at noon, and avoid folks, we, like the Samaritan woman will not be able to help telling others of our faith and our life and our God, our God of deep forgiveness and deep love.

And you never know what might happen, if you tell others of our God...walls may be broken down....

After hearing the woman's testimony.... "He told me everything I have ever done!" The Samaritans invited Jesus to stay with them, a request so extreme and absurd, a request beyond belief....

And yet, Jesus says yes, and doesn't just stay a polite hour, he stays 2 days with those hated Samaritans!!

What more might happen if we too say yes..... if at that lonely noon hour, we tell our story, and receive "(t)he water that....will become...a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

Amen.

The Rev. Megan Limburg