

Third Sunday in Lent

THE GIFT OF LIVING WATER AND THE GIFT OF NEW LIFE

John 4:5-42

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

5So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10Jesus 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. 11The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" 12Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14but 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." 15The 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." 16Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18for you have had five husbands, and the one you

have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem. 21Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." 27Just 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?" 28Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" 30They left the city and were on their way to him. 31Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. 36The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." 39Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's

testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” 40So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41And many more believed because of his word. 42They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.

DIAGNOSIS: Locked Up

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *She's a Samaritan*
Before the woman at the well meets Jesus, her life is stuck. She's been locked into a series of bad relationships. She has had five husbands to be exact (v. 18). Now she's closing in on number six. So she's stuck coming to the well to draw water at noontime (v. 6) when she won't encounter other women and have to endure public shame. In addition to her own missteps and life circumstances, she's a Samaritan. In the eyes of the Jews, that sticks her in the category of the unclean. She's locked into her race, her unhealthy relationships, and her status as one who is ostracized for her sins.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *She's Sinful*
Not only is the woman's place in society stuck, but her heart is stuck, too. When Jesus starts speaking about “the gift of God” and “living water,” (v. 10) she doubts him. The woman scoffs at Jesus for talking about water when he doesn't even have a bucket. When he presses on to explain that the water he offers will be a “spring of water gushing up to eternal life,” (v. 14) she hears it only as a way to rid herself of a taxing daily chore (v. 15). Her heart remains focused on her lot in life. With that kind of focus, she is impermeable to faith.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *She's Stuck*

Once Jesus sees right through the woman's claim that she has no husband (v. 17), she realizes that this chance encounter at the well has turned into something different altogether. "Sir, I see that you are a prophet," she responds (v. 19). What she fails to see is that this prophet has come to do, and to complete, God's work (v. 34). God sees right through her front of having no husband. He sees through her rejection of Jesus' offer of living water. As long as her heart stays locked into those sins and all the others that go along with everything she has ever done (v. 29), judgment and condemnation will be her future. Facing God's wrath, she'll realize just how stuck she really is.

PROGNOSIS: God's Grace Lets Her Go

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus Sticks with Her*

But the woman's story isn't over yet. Despite her lying, scoffing, and inability to understand what Jesus says to her there at the well, he sticks with her. When the woman pronounces, "I know that Messiah is coming...When he comes, he will proclaim [or explain-NIV] all things to us" (v. 25), Jesus gives her the great news, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you" (v. 26). She doesn't need to look any further for the Christ, the anointed one of God. Here he is! He crossed her path here at the well to proclaim the good news that he is the Messiah she has been waiting for. Before long he will cross her path again. He will take on her sin and the sin of the whole world. He will nail them to his cross. He will be pierced for her, and water will flow from his side (19:34). She won't have to go searching for water any longer. In Jesus' death and resurrection, God will pour out the "living water" (v. 10) of forgiveness, freedom, and new life, for her and for all who believe in his Son as Savior and Lord.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *She Worships*

from her Heart

Once Jesus completes his journey (v. 6) from the well, to the cross, to the grave, to the resurrection, it will be possible for the woman at the well to become the “true worshiper” (v. 23) that God designed her to be. Now that Jesus has freed her from being stuck in her sin, she can take God’s forgiveness and run with it. Her heart has been released to “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (v. 23).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : She Shares her Story

And the woman does worship the Father, by going out and proclaiming all that Jesus has done for her. She leaves her water jar behind (v. 28) and returns to the city as a new woman with a message. Her amazement from encountering Jesus is contagious. “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” she exclaims. “He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” (v. 29) As her testimony spreads, her question is answered with a resounding, “YES!” More Samaritans, more sinners, more stuck people, become forgiven and freed by the good news that in Jesus, the Messiah has come. The Samaritans hear her words and then move beyond them as they encounter Jesus for themselves and come to believe in him (vv. 40-42). The Samaritan fields were ripe for harvesting, just as Jesus told his disciples (v. 35). Even during Lent, which is the dead of winter in many places, there are ripe fields all around us. In this text, a well-side conversation between Jesus and one woman became the conversion of a whole people. In Christ, God has crossed our paths. He has freed us to do the same: to share our testimony about how God has gotten us unstuck from the sins that bind us, and how God has sent us out to proclaim everything he has done for us.