

# Third Sunday in Lent

22.03.2020  
By Trevor Williams

## Introduction

Last week we read of Nicodemus' meeting with Jesus. Now Jesus meets the woman from Samaria at Jacob's well. The contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman couldn't be more stark. Nicodemus, the Pharisee, powerful, respectable, community leader, an insider, seeks out Jesus by night. The is an outsider, and outcast, disreputable, marginalized who meets Jesus, not by night, but in the glaring light of the midday sun.

Who is an 'outsider' for you?

Imagine a meeting with such an 'outsider'.

Is conflict more likely when the person you meet is an outsider?

---

## Text

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The 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.) 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." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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." 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."

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “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!” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

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?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do 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. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.”

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They 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 Saviour of the world.”

---

## Comment

As is so frequent in St John’s Gospel, signs and symbols abound. The location of this encounter is significant. Jacob’s well is site which symbolised God’s care for all God’s people, a well that doesn’t run dry.

### *The place*

Jesus is travelling through Samaria. That may have a short cut for his journey, but to travel through Samaria was certainly the road-less-travelled for any self-respecting Jew.

### *The person*

Jesus speaking alone with a woman went against the social etiquette of the day, but for a Jewish man to speak with a Samaritan woman, alone, was totally unacceptable – as the disciples unspoken criticism makes clear “Why are you speaking with her?” (verse 27) and the woman’s own comment “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (verse 8) The woman chose a time to visit the well when very few other people would be around. Such a laborious task of fetching water was made so much more difficult in the extreme heat of the midday sun. With a reputation like hers it was easier to choose a time when no-one else was around.

### *Living water*

It’s worth remembering how vital it is in the Middle East to have access to water.. Today access to water is a major factor in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The Samaritan’s woman’s life was shaped and burdened by the constant necessity to visit this well for water.

Jesus talks to her about 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.”

Hearing of this life-liberating opportunity woman says “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” Liberation for this woman is not just around drawing water. This woman’s life was plagued by a lack of security and identity. She had a succession of husbands – in those days it was the husband that provided security and identity for his bride. She had neither. We are not told the circumstances which led to her many husbands but It is worth noting that Jesus does not condemn her as a sinner. Jesus points out the circumstances of her life as a way of letting her know that he understands why she is so thirsty for this ‘living water’.

The Samaritan woman is clearly moved by this response and acknowledges that this Jewish rabbi is indeed a prophet. So what is the answer to the age old dispute between Jews and Samaritans, about the appropriate place for the worship of God. Jesus responds by telling her what is important for worship is not the place of worship, but to worship in spirit and truth. Suddenly this woman sees that amidst the confusion of the theological arguments about the place of worship, this Jewish rabbi is tell her she can worship God in spirit and in truth.

This is indeed Good News! Jesus has been talking about the fulfilment of God’s promises, and the dawning of a new age. Her thoughts immediately turn to the coming Messiah. She is ready (almost) to hear Jesus say “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” v26

So the woman runs off back to the city, buzzing with hope, which sounds almost too good to be true. She tells everyone about her conversation with Jesus adding He cannot be the Messiah, can he? The question expecting a negative reply! She doesn’t expect to be believed. After all why should anyone believe someone like her? The most unlikely witness became the means whereby many others lives were transformed as they came to meet Jesus and asked him to stay with them for some days.

---

## Response

### ‘Us’ and ‘Them’

The need to learn how we can live with those who are different from us, is an urgent global task. It is natural to gravitate towards those who are like 'us' and to distance ourselves from those who are different, like 'them'.

Take a moment to reflect on who might belong to 'them' for you.

- **Recall a time when you felt uncomfortable walking through a particular area? What made you uncomfortable?**
- **Recall a time when you saw someone, or a group of people who you wished to avoid? What about them, made you want to avoid them?**
- **Are there people you find difficult to trust? Why?**  
In a conflict or when we feel threatened the barriers between 'us' and 'them' tends to harden.

### **Distancing the 'Other'**

Now think of the Samaritan woman, 'the other' – the one who is excluded, shunned, cut off, disapproved of by 'respectable' people. What feelings would surface if you were treated like that?

How would you characterise Jesus' approach to her? If you were the Samaritan woman how would your response to Jesus be different than to those who exclude you?

Jesus command was that we should 'Love our enemies'. Enemies include those whom we distance because we think they are morally in error. Does Jesus mean 'Draw the enemy close'?

Is there ever a time when we should distance ourselves from others because they are different?

According to Jesus, who is excluded from worshipping God? Does this challenge our attitudes to 'outsiders'. If so how?

### **Action**

How can we be 'Good News' to an outsider we know?

---

## **Prayer**

### **THE COVENTRY LITANY OF RECONCILIATION**

*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,

FATHER FORGIVE

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,

FATHER FORGIVE

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,

FATHER FORGIVE

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,

FATHER FORGIVE

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,

FATHER FORGIVE

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children,

FATHER FORGIVE

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,

FATHER FORGIVE

*Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*