

**Third Sunday In Lent + March 19, 2017**  
**Atonement Lutheran Church, Beloit, WI**  
**John 4:5-42**

Nancy Raabe, Pastor

*The Gospel of our Lord, according to John, the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter. Glory to you, O Lord.*

<sup>5</sup>[Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.<sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.<sup>7</sup>A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."<sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)<sup>9</sup>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.)<sup>10</sup>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."<sup>11</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"<sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"<sup>13</sup>Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> 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."<sup>15</sup>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."

This is only the beginning of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. This remarkable account describes how one average unsuspecting woman became a great evangelizer, without even realizing what she was doing, and how the better part of an entire city came to believe in Jesus, all because of her. And the best part is: This is a story that could be true of any of us!

It begins with this woman at the place where many of us are or have been—intelligent people to whom the world is pretty much as it seems. We are occupied with the busy-ness of life, getting things done, going from one day to the next, trying to keep it all together, and that's pretty much all we know or have time for. For this woman, going to the well to draw water was probably one of the many daily chores that filled her existence. Every day she trudged to the well, drew water, and lugged it home again to be used for drinking, cooking, and washing.

But one day she encountered a Jewish man sitting by the well who shattered the world as she knew it.

The first thing Jesus did, as we just heard, was get her to listen by telling something that seemed impossible: That he could give her living water—water that would keep her from ever being thirsty again or, as she heard it, would keep her well supplied with water so she'd never have to come back to the well. "Sir, give me this water!" she pleaded.

This is the first step in discipleship--recognizing our deep need for something more, the yearning for hope in the midst of the crushing load of our lives. Without this, the world can seem like a dark place—one that seems unable to cope with homelessness or human trafficking, one in which people languish and die for lack of adequate medical services, one in which countless innocent people are oppressed and killed in countries torn apart by war. If you saw the HBO documentary this past week on Syria you might recall the anguished cry of one man in the aftermath of yet another bombing: "What have the children done? What have the civilians done?" Where is hope in the midst of those bombings? Here at home, our government leaders are threatening to take money from services that are help to sustain life in a wide variety forms, such as Meals on Wheels and the Great Lakes Restoration project, and instead spend those funds on weapons and walls. Where is hope in the midst of those cutbacks? And in our own lives, we find ourselves doing and saying things we wish we hadn't and can't forgive ourselves for. Where is hope in the midst of guilt that eats away at us and keeps us from living fully as the unique, gifted individuals God created us to be?

The Samaritan woman is sensing that that this strange Jewish man is offering her hope—in the form of living water! But even though Samaritans were familiar with the concept of the Messiah and looked for that savior to come, she doesn't understand what he is saying. She thinks he's telling her

he'll satisfy both her physical thirst and the daily need for buckets of water: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

She can't know what he's saying, because she doesn't know his identity. Jesus grasps this, and so he cleverly finds a way to get her to begin to see who he is. Here's the rest of this story:

<sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." <sup>17</sup>The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; <sup>18</sup>for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband!" <sup>19</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." <sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." <sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

<sup>28</sup>Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup>"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

<sup>39</sup>Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." <sup>40</sup>So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup>And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup>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 Savior of the world."

*The Gospel of our Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.*

What is remarkable about this story for each of us is that even though the woman wasn't completely convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, she still ran to the city to spread the news about what she'd seen and heard. This tells us two things: First, that doubt is a natural component of faith—anyone who tells you they have all the answers, doesn't—and second, that in order for the church to grow, we need to be talking to people out of our own experience and telling them what we know and what we have seen and heard.

All the Samaritan woman said was, “Come and see!” Can we do that? Can we simply tell people what we know—how we have experienced that God cares for us, or that God rescued us, or that God forgave us? Or can we talk about how we have seen God’s love, mercy and forgiveness embodied in others? That is actually how I came to faith, by observing the faith in others: I didn’t grow up in the church, and before I went to seminary I hadn’t even really read the Bible or much of it, anyway. To be honest, I learned the stories of the Bible teaching Sunday School to preschoolers while our kids were little – I was just one step ahead of the 3-year-olds and hoping they didn’t ask too many questions! But faith was growing in me through people I knew who for whom the Christian gospel was the central narrative of their lives, people who weren’t trying to convert me but were simply living out of the love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. The love that always forgives, because we are always forgiven. The love that never ends. The love that has always been the most powerful force in the universe, and always will be.

In a few moments we will sing about what it’s like to hear Jesus’ voice. About how Jesus is the light of this dark world. About how we look to Jesus and find, in him, our star, our sun, the one who will light our pathways until our traveling days are done.

“Come and see.” That’s all the Samaritan woman said. And many believed in Jesus because of her testimony. Can we do that? Can we invite people to the place where we know Christ to be present? Do we have the courage and conviction to say to our friends, our extended family, our co-workers: “Come and see?”

Amen.