

'WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL' – HOMILY – 19 MARCH 2017

Today's Gospel is John 4:5-42. Let us explore it together.

HOW DO WE MOVE FROM A 21ST CENTURY WAY OF THINKING TO A PEOPLE 2000 YEARS AGO, WHO WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE REFERENCES, SYMBOLS AND ALLUSIONS OF TODAY'S GOSPEL PASSAGE?

The Samaritan woman at the well becomes a disciple.
She has the courage to ask and question.
She carries the 'Good News' to her village.
Her dialogue with Jesus develops, she changes, she shares, she invites others.

DO WE SEE OURSELVES IN HER?

CAN WE DISCUSS OUR LIFE CHOICES WITH JESUS?

"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.'"

In Genesis 29:9-13, Jacob meets Rachel at the well.
The shepherds are already there in dialogue with him.
It is an unusual time of the day for watering.
She is bringing the sheep to the well for watering.
Jacob rolls back the stone from the well's mouth, and waters the flock.
Rachel runs to tell the news to her father Laban. Laban runs to meet him.
As we follow the Gospel, we see Jesus, the Samaritan woman, the villagers, and the disciples succeed Jacob, Rachel, Laban, and the shepherds in a whole new way.

Both Jesus and the Samaritan woman break down the male/female and Jewish/Samaritan taboos, and speak to each other.
Both Jesus and the Samaritan risked so much to even dialogue.
They could be penalised heavily for having a conversation. Both were vulnerable.

Dialogue for us at times can involve courage, hope, energy,

A desire to understand and make a difference.

And recognising the vulnerability of each other.

A freedom ensues as they talk.

A freedom in overcoming gender and ethnic and cultural and religious prejudices.

WE ASK OURSELVES – WHAT ARE OUR GENDER, CULTURAL, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS PREJUDICES TODAY?

LET US TAKE TIME TO NAME THEM

Name them in our families, in our work, in our church, in our nation.

Name them in our expectations of others.

Name them in the way we speak of others.

JOHN'S GOSPEL CHAPTERS - MARITAL REFERENCES

Not as familiar to us is the way 2,000 years ago, the **MARITAL REFERENCES** would have stood out.

- **CHAPTER 1:**

John the Baptist is the Best Man, preparing the betrothal conditions for the groom. He prepares the way, the voice in the wilderness.

- **CHAPTER 2:**

There is already an allusion to Jesus as the Bridegroom.

When Jesus turns the water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana,

The chief steward congratulates the bridegroom on the keeping the good wine until now.

Jesus is not the bridegroom at this particular ceremony but is the bridegroom for us as faith community.

- **CHAPTER 3:28-29:**

John the Baptist says,

"I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.

He who has the bride is the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

For this reason my joy has been fulfilled.

He must increase, but I must decrease."

- **CHAPTER 4**

Now there is an allusion with Samaria and Judah, the Samaritan woman and Jesus.

Jesus welcomes the Samaritan woman and her village into a covenant.

Some of the Samaritans of former Israel awaited a Messiah like Moses.

Some of the Jews of Judah awaited a Messiah like King David.

The prophet Ezekiel predicted Israel and Judah once more being reunited.

HOW WILL JESUS BE A BRIDEGROOM TO BOTH JUDAH AND SAMARIA?

OR FOR US, HOW ARE THE MANY PEOPLE IN OUR COUNTRY, THE BRIDE OF CHRIST?

HOW ARE WE, woman and man, adult and child, young and elderly,

Indigenous and migrant, farmer and city worker,

With disabilities and limitations and giftedness and creativity,

Pastoralist and miner, employed and unemployed,

Artist and author, musician and hobbyist, refugee and asylum seeker –

HOW ARE WE ONE AND HOW ARE WE BETROTHED TO JESUS CHRIST?

Let us continue with the Gospel passage.

Jesus offers living water, a gift of God.

"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.'

Five husbands plus the one she has now. $5+1=6$. Six incomplete.

Just like the six (6) stone water jars at the wedding feast.

The symbol of seven. The perfect number in those days.

Even the symbol points to Jesus completing us, fulfilling our lives.

"What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

Our ancestors worshipped 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 worshippers 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.'

We see the mission of Jesus, seeking out people, to worship the Father in spirit and truth.

HOW DO WE WORSHIP? WHO DO WE WORSHIP? IS IT IN SPIRIT AND IN 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. "

He cannot be the Messiah, can he?

Scripture scholars vary on the meaning of the intention of the sentence.

IS SHE UNSURE?

IS SHE DOUBTFUL?

IS SHE SPEAKING RHETORICALLY?

IS SHE MAKING HER FAITH STATEMENT?

And not just the sentence, but what about the context.

If she sees Jesus as Messiah, and tells the villagers, is it safer for her to put the question to them in a way where they can answer for themselves?

(The Samaritan woman knows her religious and ethnic traditions.)

WHY DID SHE LEAVE THE WATER JAR?

DOES IT ALLUDE TO THE DISCIPLES LEAVING THEIR NETS BEHIND TO FOLLOW JESUS?

IS THIS ANOTHER WAY OF EMPHASING THAT SHE IS A DISCIPLE?

“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.’ “

What a wonderful way of reminding us of humility.

1. Of all those who have laboured before us and that we have entered into their labour.
2. We reap that for which we did not 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 for 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.’*

**WHAT MUST IT HAVE BEEN LIKE TO HAVE JESUS STAY IN YOUR VILLAGE FOR TWO DAYS
TO REMAIN WITH YOU?**

And to see people from your village becoming believers.

And that your testimony

As we know, Jesus commits himself to stay, to remain with us every day, for always.

THANK YOU TO THE WOMEN OF OUR PARISH COMMUNITY WHO OFFERED INSIGHTS ON THE ENCOUNTER OF JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

Two groupings of comments were about -

1. Respecting other Christian denominations

These comments include partners, family members and close friends who are from various Christian traditions.

As one contributor said “bigotry I believe would not be acceptable to Jesus”.

Reflections on the memories of past generations and the hurts and rules which divided families because of religious traditions. “Love brings us together”.

2. Other comments spoke about “the many Catholic traditions that are in our parish family”.

The cultural ways of expressing our faith, the languages and sacred stories.

On Friday during our St Joseph’s parish school prayer day, “we loved the Filipino, Indian, Iraqi and Syrian prayers and movement”.

At St John Fisher College whole school Mass, the Blessing and Lord’s Prayer were in Gaelic for St Patrick’s Day. Tri-lingual First Reconciliation yesterday for some of our children.

Another said “The point of Jesus a Jew – the woman a Samaritan – I think we are experiencing this in our Parish now – other Faiths – our acceptance of these.”

One person on Jesus the Christ, the Messiah coming again –

“For me knowing the Messiah will come again is a given – when, why how – who knows.”

Other insights and experiences were shared:

- I am the Samaritan woman. Jesus is at the well waiting for me to come to receive living water. He has no cup to offer me but instead I have my cup to give to him – me with all my failings – he knows me so well. On this occasion I can give something back to Him. I can give my daily life offering to Him (my water). I can in my daily life give to Him the good, the bad, and the ugly. This can be in many forms – love of others, compassion, listening, helping others in need, even anger (on occasions) and much more.
- The disapproval of the Apostles, to me, at first, appeared to be very judgmental and I have been just that on occasions not knowing the circumstances I misjudged. Throughout my life journey I have come to realize I must not judge any situation, circumstance or person when I am not aware of what the situation, circumstance really is or of what the person is currently experiencing – maybe when all the details are known help may be given rather than judgement.
- Can I personally evangelize within my Community through my daily life to offer a drink from the well? The story of Elsa is a firm confirmation of this.
- I think the coincidence of the National Women’s Day last week triggered the point of Gender. My thought is that Jesus does not discriminate. The Woman at the Well – The Prodigal son. In this gospel Jesus speaks of the most vulnerable, not gender but it is good to be reaffirmed in Jesus’ eyes women are equal to men.

- I am really touched and inspired by the fact that the woman received so much joy and release from her encounter with Jesus. This encounter transformed her and filled with this love and joy she became an evangelist. She left her bucket behind, symbolising everything that was weighing her down and I think she almost danced into the city to share her joy with the townspeople, these people who had condemned and judged her. Her transformation was so obvious that they listened to and believed her. What a transformation!
- I love that Jesus's first engagement with the woman is to make her feel needed "Give me a drink..." Needed and found worthy she is then lifted out of her loneliness and isolation and turns with hope to listen and trust. She is empowered then to bring the Good News to the others who had once shunned her but now are compelled to listen to this 'transformed and alive' messenger.
- Although it is Jesus who at first appears to be the one who is thirsty, it is the woman who instead thirsts. She mentions that the well is deep - living water is difficult to reach. This woman of faith had been seeking the Messiah, the promised one. Through Jesus' encounter, her eyes are opened and she willingly accepts the living water that he offers.
- *Jesus is the best! He continues to uphold and promote the equality and value of women, always treating us with respect and dignity.
And He did this 2000 years ago, making Him all the more remarkable.
For my part, I need to remember to stop, take time to sit quietly at the well and listen...really listen carefully to His gentle voice and to what He is saying to me.
A wonderful conversion story and it does not stop there because we are called by Jesus again and again to conversion.*

Thank you.

Fr Gerry

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – With the Samaritan Woman at the Well – 19 March 2017]

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