

“A Reason to Believe”

Third Sunday in Lent

John 4:5-42

Exodus 17:1-7

February 3, 2008

The passage from Exodus deals with God providing water for physical thirst. The reason it is remembered and told is because it speaks of God providing for the needs of His people. There is another story remembered and told about God providing water for spiritual thirst.

John, as he tells his story about Jesus, very early on (4th chapter) tells the story about Jesus' encounter with a woman at a well.

Everything about this story is wrong:

- Jesus should not have been in Samaria as a good Jew
- He should not have talked to ANY Samaritan
- He should not have talked to a woman
- He should not have talked to a woman in public
- She should not have been there at that time of day.

She was there for water. He asked her for water. A simple enough request, but for everything about the story that is wrong.

He understood her situation in life. He understood that she had gone there for drinking water. But he spoke to her of much deeper things than just water. He spoke to her of hungers and thirsts that were greater than what earth's water could satisfy. He spoke to her with care rather than accusation about the hungers and thirsts that were driving her.

They started with something as simple as a drink of water, but soon the conversation moved to spiritual things. Because it was dealing with the hunger of her soul and spirit. He began where she was at. He began with common ground. He began with her needs not his own. It was His care for her that made all the difference.

By the time the conversation was over she believed. Not only did she believe but she became a witness. She went back into town and began to say things like, "He told me everything I have ever done." **"You've just got to meet this man."** Now you and I have experienced having someone talk to us about our past. Or the things of our past that we are sensitive to and maybe not very proud of. If we think about it we realize we are not going to go around inviting someone to meet someone who has condemned us, or ridiculed us, or put us down. This conversation, insightful into her life as it was, had lifted her and changed her and given her new life.

People could see such a difference in her that they invited this hated outsider into their community to stay. (v. 40) By the time He left, others had come to Him and let it be known.

They said to her, "We believe not just because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that He really is the Savior of the world."

His conversation with her helped her find new life. Her witness helped them find new life. It's a great line there at the end of the story – **"we believe because we have experienced Him for ourselves."** That's the point where it all became very personal for them.

Oh, but everything about this story is right, for it teaches us about the Kingdom of God. That is why it was put down and kept and evaluated by the early Church as necessary to keep. Why on earth would Jesus put Himself intentionally into this position? Why would He be talking to a person like this? Because this is what the Kingdom of God is about.

Paul uses the imagery that before Jesus came along for us, we were all enemies of God through our sin. **"We were God's enemies, but He made us His friends through the death of His son."** (Romans 5:12) We were the ones whom God COULD hate. But God came for us in Jesus of Nazareth.

The woman in this famous story is all of us. At some time or other. No one can make it through this life without help from outside at some point. I am reminded of Robby Arthur, who was my savior in elementary school. He protected me against bullies. This woman needed someone who would save her, but she didn't realize it. So, all of us, in our state of pride. We are like the Israelites, **kicking and screaming all the way to freedom**, needing water so badly, **willing to go back to slavery to get that water**. Until we finally get our eyes open and can proclaim with all the beauty of the words that close the story of John: **"We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard Him, and we know that He is the savior."**

So is the verse in here Blessed are those who believe without seeing ... for that is where we come in.

What is the reason to believe? Because we have seen and heard for ourselves, because we have experienced for ourselves. Hey, don't just take my word for it. Because we experience His presence at this table.

This is Communion Sunday and just as they saw and experienced Him in their presence, this is one of the ways we experience the Living Christ in our presence. He is here with us in this moment, in the sacrament, in our circle. He brings us healing and wholeness. He demonstrates Himself to us.