



Resurrection Journeys

Session 3: Valuing the marginal, focusing outward

Encountering Jesus at the well

John 4:5 - 42

As we take time to consider this popular passage, I invite us to look carefully at both the need of Jesus and the need of the woman. John does not give us her name; she is identified simply as a Samaritan woman. I think this is significant because it gives us, the readers, the opportunity not only to see a historical figure but also to see ourselves and to see others. A nameless, faceless person can be anyone. This passage invites us to see and, in seeing, to ask how we respond to who we see.

I mentioned the need that Jesus had. John has boldly proclaimed the deity of Jesus earlier in his Gospel: “The Word was God” (John 1:1). There is no confusion in John’s writing about who Jesus is. Yet here, John also allows us to see the full humanity of Christ. Jesus is tired. *The Message* Bible puts it this way: “Jesus, worn out by the trip, sat down at the well.”

When the Samaritan woman arrives at the well at noon, Jesus asks her for a drink of water. She, a Samaritan woman, is being asked for a drink by a Jewish man. By virtue of her culture, she is despised by the Jews. Yet it is she that Jesus looks to for his need to be met: “Give me a drink.”

Let us pause here. In our own tiredness and need, how open are we to asking for help from those regarded as outcasts?

I imagine the woman laughing as she looks at Jesus and says, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?” The laughter is not because it is funny; it is the laughter of shock and confusion, with an underlying question: Are you sure you know what you are asking, and who you are asking? And I wonder if, in her shock, we also see Jesus’ tired face looking straight at her, perhaps with a gentle smile, silently affirming, *Yes, it is you I am asking.*

Our shared diocesan value, *Travelling Well Together*, encourages us to consider what it means to value the small, the vulnerable, and the marginal. If we understand “marginal” to mean minor or unimportant, then this woman, as a Samaritan, knew herself to be viewed as unimportant in the eyes of the Jews and insignificant in the eyes of a man as a woman. Her expectation was that this Jewish man would see her in the same way. Yet by the simple act of Jesus asking her for water to meet his need, she is no longer on the outside. She has been brought near.

Next, Jesus speaks of “the gift of God” being offered. The Greek word for gift, *dōrea*, means a ‘free gift’ or benefit. In seeing this Samaritan woman, Jesus knew himself to be a gift to her. What he offers is for her benefit, and it is free. She does not have to earn it.

As followers of Christ, when we encounter the vulnerable and the marginal in our society and communities, do we recognise the gift within us to offer? The gift of God’s love, God’s truth, and the gift of Jesus Christ himself, the giver of living water.

I wonder if, as she listens to Jesus speak of this free gift and living water, it would be easy for her to think, *If you have living water, why are you asking me for water from this well?* Perhaps the Holy Spirit is inviting us, through John’s telling of this account, to take people deeper, from what they know and are familiar with, into something greater that they cannot provide for themselves. *You, too, the one I choose to see, can have this gift.*

As their conversation unfolds, we can imagine the woman having given Jesus' water, and Jesus perhaps holding the bowl she provided as he says, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life" (John 4:13–14).

Bible commentator David Guzik writes, "*It's common for people to try and satisfy their God-created inner thirst through many things, or through anything except for what Jesus gives. People are thirsty they want, they long, they search, they reach but only what Jesus gives satisfies to the deepest levels of man's soul and spirit.*"

At this point, Jesus has her attention. She wants this water. For her, it would mean not being physically thirsty again, not having to come to the well at noon in the heat of the day, and not having to face people in her community. She could remain hidden. But this is not what Jesus is speaking about. He sees her deeper need. She, too, is worn out, but unlike Jesus, her weariness is not from travelling; it is from life.

Is this an invitation to listen carefully to what is being said so that we can understand the heart behind the words? Failing to do so may prevent us from truly hearing.

Jesus then shifts the conversation and goes personal. This may make us uncomfortable. Why does he ask about her husband? Why does this matter? We might feel it is intrusive or rude. In my own experience of healing on the streets, I have often felt prompted to ask personal questions, usually prefaced with, "I hope you don't mind me asking..." These moments have often opened the door to honest and meaningful conversations.

When Jesus says, "Go and get your husband," it is not to shame her. "I have no husband," she replies. Jesus already knew this. He knew her story. I invite us to see the gentleness and compassion with which Jesus speaks the truth about her life: "You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't your husband" (Message Bible).

Her sin is laid bare, but without condemnation. People's lives are not tidy. Jesus does not press for more information, and neither does she offer it. This is not a counselling session; it is an open door to receiving the free gift of living water and entering a new life of worship. She is heard. She is not judged. Feeling uncomfortable, she changes the subject, and that is okay. Jesus does not push further but gently leads her into the truth of what it means to be a true worshipper of God.

I am encouraged by the woman's response. We might even call her the first female evangelist. Jesus' non-accusatory encounter does not make her feel diminished. Instead, it fills her with excitement as she returns to her town to tell others about the man who knew everything she ever did. This invites us to ask: when people tell us their stories, how do they leave our presence? Could it be said, "They must be followers of Jesus Christ; they listened to me and pointed me to him"?

As I close, I am drawn to Jesus' words: "The fields are already ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). As we participate in this 100-day prayer journey, we are invited to look around our diocese and recognise that the fields are ripe. There is a harvest. Together, as we see those in need, draw near to them, listen deeply, and point them to Jesus, they too may receive eternal life and living water.

This is the grace of God: grace that crosses boundaries.

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