

St Thomas Episcopal Church
Sermon – Third Sunday in Lent
12 March 2023
Reference Bible Passages: John 4:5-42

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Today's Gospel tells us a compelling story about the life of Jesus. Jesus and his disciples are traveling from Judea to Galilee. The town of Samaria is along their path. Jesus says in vs. 4, "I must go through Samaria (John 4:4). Jesus was adamant and "I must go through Samaria" – Jesus had a mission to accomplish. Jesus wanted to go to that sentimental site in Sychar Samaria –the land of his ancestor Jacob's well.

A lesson from today's Gospel is the word "Prejudice." Prejudice has two parts: pre (in advance) and judicial (judgment). The word prejudice is to pre-judge a person or a matter before getting any of the facts. The word prejudice is more prevalent in issues connected with race and ethnicity. We often judge people based on their skin color or ethnicity before we know them.

Prejudice is not a modern world sin; it was there in Jesus' day. The Jews in Galilee and Judea were prejudiced and did not like the Samaritans. The Samaritans intermarried with Assyrians following the Assyrian invasion of Israel in the eighth century B.C. and adopted their customs and gods. Because of this, Jews refused to have anything to do or even to set foot in Samaria. However, Jesus and His disciples were an exception. On their journey from Judea to Galilee, Jesus went through Samaria, where He met and talked to a woman to whom He revealed Himself as the Messiah, the only Source of living water (John 4). Jesus felt the human need for God's love, not depending on race or gender, or status.

Now the story goes on; Jesus is waiting alone for his appointment; a woman appears; she lives in Sychar, a city in Samaria—she has been married five times and living with a man who is not her husband. The woman may have been considered an outcast in her town. She was being marginalized, the "other" person. The woman would have gone through many rejections and heartaches, may have been taken advantage of, and maybe felt unworthy and devalued. People in the city may have spoken of her disparagingly. Perhaps she came at noon, the hottest time of the day when no one else was around and no one was at the well; she did not want to hear other people's judgmental words.

Here she meets Jesus!

Interestingly, the first-person Jesus ever told he was the Messiah was not an influential Israeli leader, a chief priest in the synagogue, or the mayor of Jerusalem — it was, to the Samaritan women, an outcast.

The woman is not named in the story. Yet, her encounter with Jesus is the most extended recorded story between Jesus the Messiah and any other individual in the Gospel of John. The Samaritan woman represented the lowest of the low during Jesus' time— a female in a society where women are demeaned and not given the right status. Jews traditionally despised the Samaritan race, and this woman lived in shame as a social outcast. The outcome of this women's meeting with Jesus is a holy encounter with Christ and receiving living water – eternal salvation.

As a child, perhaps this Samaritan woman would have had grand dreams of marriage, having a happy family, and having children, but life did not turn out as planned. She had made mistakes; people had done her wrong, and she was lonely and hurting.

Now Jesus – God of the universe, a loving God was waiting for her at the well. Jesus had time for her. God never forgets a hurting soul. God often uses people like us to heal a hurting world. When we visit the jail, we often encounter people who are hurting. A 23-year-old man of color is in jail, sits before you, and says, "I do not know how I can survive and go on." No one comes to see him; his family has disowned him. He feels all alone and hurting. What can we say or do? This Samaritan woman maybe felt the same emotions. Most of the time, what happens in this world and around us is not fair.

This Samaritan woman came to draw water feeling unworthy and defeated, but she left that day with a new person and a new self-image. She saw herself as valuable, redeemed, forgiven, and a child of God's family.

The story has three characters: Jesus, the disciples, and the Samaritan women. The disciples are running around buying food, only concerned about themselves. The Samaritan woman is sad and hurting. Jesus, full of love and compassion, talks to the woman. Jesus asks her for a drink, culminating in her salvation and the whole town. This all comes about by Jesus offering her "living water."

Most of the human body is water, averaging roughly 60%. Science tells us that losing about 4% of total body water would lead to dehydration, and a

loss of 15% can be fatal. So water is essential for living. So Jesus offers the women “living water.” Water that will last forever. I like the metaphor Jesus uses” The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life (John 4:13). “Spring of water gushing” is a beautiful and soothing feeling.

Jesus would give her living water to make her mistakes into a miracle of change. The living water would heal her, restore her, heal, and make something great out of her life.

She ran back and told the whole town to see this man Jesus who told her about her life. They all came in haste to see Jesus. She was not the only one that changed; Jesus changed her whole city. She was no longer marginalized; she had respect. No longer discarded or made feel unworthy, she felt valuable in her town. She knew she belonged and was a child of the Almighty God.

The story of the Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a beautiful example of vulnerability, love, truth, redemption, and acceptance. Jesus accepted her “as she was.” Jesus only asked her to believe.

Our prayer is that we can see the world through Jesus’ eyes. Share Jesus with others just as Jesus shared Himself with the Samaritan Women—without prejudice, but with love.

In the words of Bishop Michael Curry, he describes the Christian’s life: it is “LOVE.” Unselfish, sacrificial, this is the way of the cross, the way of God, the way of life”. **Amen.**