

Third Sunday in Lent (A)

The Woman at the Well - John 4: 5 - 15, 19 - 26, 39 - 42

- 5 So he came to a city of Samar'ia, called Sy'char, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.
- 6 Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.
- 7 There came a woman of Samar'ia to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."
- 8 For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.
- 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samar'ia?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.
- 10 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."
- 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water?"
- 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?"
- 13 Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again,
- 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
- 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."
- 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.
- 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."
- 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.
- 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.
- 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.
- 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."
- 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things."
- 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."
- 39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."
- 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.
- 41 And many more believed because of his word.
- 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."



John

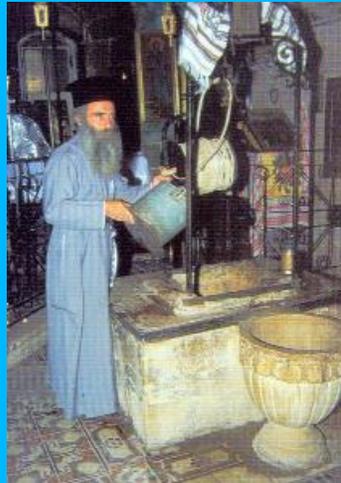
Chapter 4

1 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John

2 (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, just his disciples),

3 he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

4 He had to pass through Samaria.



The well, from which Jesus once asked a Samaritan woman for a drink, is fed by underground springs, and its water is fresh and cool. Because the water is moving and not from a cistern, the ancients called it "living water" -- a term to which Jesus gave a new and special meaning.

"...the sixth hour"

Hours of the day were counted from dawn; if dawn was about 6:00 A.M., the time referred to in the verse was noon.

Cf. also:

Luke 23:44 "It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour..."

John 19:14 "Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!"

Acts 10:9 "On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray."

Breaking down barriers / prejudices

The dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman would astonish his contemporaries for three reasons: the hatred between Jews and Samaritans, the moral status of the woman, and gender segregation.

In the Mediterranean culture of the first century, the daily flow of life meant to separate the sexes, especially in the routines of a common village. For example, in the morning and evening, women would gather together so they could fill water jars from a common well in the middle of the marketplace. During mid-day, however, only men would conduct business in the market place.

As the story began deep in Samaria, Jesus visited Sychar. Tired from the trip, he sat down at the Jacob's well and requested a drink from a Samaritan woman drawing water. Surprised, the woman objected. [4:6-9] Why? Not only did society separate genders,

many Jews believed Samaritan women were unclean from birth. Association with a Samaritan woman would make a Jewish man unclean, intermarriage would automatically excommunicate him. The fact Jesus sat alone with the woman increased her suspicions.

The Living Water

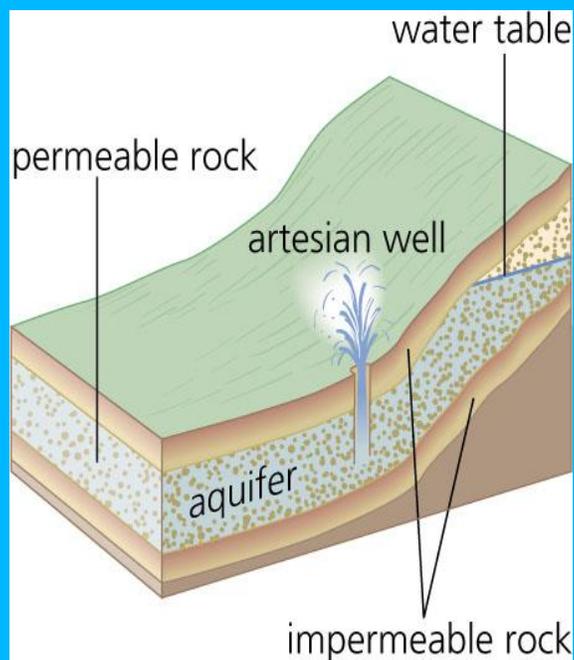
Jesus moves from speaking material terms to the spiritual. The woman however does not realise this and continues to speak in practical / material terms. It takes some time for the woman to appreciate the change of direction in the conversation.

If the well was too deep, how could Jesus offer water he could not fetch? Was he greater than the ancient Jacob, one of the patriarchs? [4:12]

At the core of the debate lie two questions:

- What was Jesus' living water?
- Who was Jesus?

Answering the first question, Jesus compared the water from Jacob's well with his living water. Water from Jacob's well satisfied physical thirst. Lack of this water would cause thirst again. But the living water Jesus offered truly satisfied, because it gave eternal life. Jesus painted the image an artesian spring, water leaping up in an inexhaustible supply, leaping up into life everlasting. [4:13-14]



Who is Jesus?

The woman understood only in part. She desired eternal life, but only as a continuation of her present existence. [4:15] She did not realize that the reception of God's gift required

her to look to the giver. Here John answered the second question: Who is Jesus?

Who is Jesus? The woman saw Jesus as a Jewish prophet, one who worshiped God at the Temple in Jerusalem. She, however, was a Samaritan who had her own place of worship. [4:19-20]

Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim (4000 ft above sea level) in sight of Jacob's well. In their revolution against the Syrians, Jews conquered the area and destroyed a Samaritan temple in 128 B.C. Excavations of the mount indicate a Roman temple and a Christian church also existed there. The self-proclaimed descendants of the Samaritans still worship on the mountain top every Passover.



Mount Gerizim

By answering the woman's objection to the place of worship and revealing God's gift - the Spirit - Jesus defined himself. Yes, the Jews, not the Samaritans, had the true religion because God saves through his Chosen People. [4:22] But, the time was fast approaching when the location of worship would be irrelevant. Indeed, in the presence of Jesus, the time had arrived. [4:21,23a] "...true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth..." [4:23b] The twice-repeated phrase "Spirit and truth" needs explanation.

Spirit and Truth

For John, placing "Spirit" and "truth" together made them equal (Spirit=Truth). So the phrase "Spirit and truth" can mean "the Spirit is Truth (i.e. God himself)." Or, it can mean "the Spirit is God's instrument that reveals the true God and the truth about him."

John 4:23b-24 mixed both meanings. On the one hand, the Spirit was God's instrument of revelation. The Spirit sought believers to worship the Father [4:23c "...the Father seeks such people to worship him..."]. The Spirit empowered believers to worship the Father [4:23b "true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth..."]. In these two ways, the Spirit established a relationship between worshipers and the Father through

revelation.

On the other hand, Jesus clearly identified the Spirit as God. Those who worship God can only do so through the Spirit. [4:24] In other words, God the Spirit must live within the believer before he or she can truly worship God. The Spirit would be the inner dwelling spring of living water leaping up to eternal life.

Now the woman knew. Gender, nationality, and moral standing did not matter. Only the Spirit mattered. God's people would worship through the Spirit (instrument of revelation) and in the Spirit (God himself). However, only the Messiah could reveal the Spirit. Only the Messiah could tell the woman "everything" (that is, show her the Truth). [4:25]. So, she asked indirectly, "Are you the Messiah?"

"Are you the Messiah?"

Jesus responded not only in the affirmative ("Yes, I am the Messiah"). He also revealed his true nature to the woman: "I AM, the one talking to you." The phrase "I AM" echoed the Hebrew name for God, **יְהוָה** (YHWH), which had its roots in the verb "to be." When Jesus told the woman "I AM," he showed her God alive and acting in the world. And, he extended to her God's inner life, his Spirit. [4:26]

Through his response the woman came to faith [4:42] along with others in the town. [4:39] But, their faith ultimately did not rely on the witness of the woman. The people's direct experience with Jesus brought them to proclaim who he was and enjoy the gift he offered them. [4:42]