

SERMON FOR LENT 3C

PREACHED MARCH 19, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXT: John 4.5-42, Exodus 17.1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5.1-11

On my recent vacation, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with many new people. Now, I'm usually a little **shy** about doing so - even though I seem very **outgoing** to lots of you. But for whatever reason I found myself greeting people I didn't **know** and striking up conversations with **perfect strangers**.

It was probably because we were in a **shared experience** and feeling a bit **vulnerable**, traveling to and from a **foreign country**, in a **line** that seems endless, confused about which **bus** to get on, gazing at the array of unfamiliar foods on the all-you-can-eat buffet.

Sometimes a **smile** from a stranger in a new situation, or a **comment** or helpful **suggestion** about a shared experience, helps us to take a deep breath and realize that we aren't **alone** in the world - and that we may actually be able to **learn** from the experience of others. Sometimes those experiences **also** help us to realize that our **pre-conceived notions** about people may have been **incorrect**.

I would imagine that the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well that noonday was utterly **shocked** when a Jewish man actually spoke to her in public, asking for her help. A lengthy conversation ensues - the **longest** such conversation recorded in the scriptures between Jesus and another person. And when all is said and done, both persons are **profoundly changed** by the experience.

The encounter begins with what may seem like an **ordinary request**: Jesus asks her for a drink of water. However, the woman knows that this man - an **enemy** of her people - is **crossing** any number of **boundaries** by speaking with her. Jesus continues to **engage** her, revealing not only how much he **knows** about her but what he can **offer** her: **living water**, the kind of water that **quenches every thirst** and **gushes up eternal life** for all who drink of it.

Whether they realize it or not, both Jesus and the woman are in **need**, and they reveal their **vulnerability** to each other. Jesus is thirsty and needs a drink of water. And she needs the water that only Jesus can provide. That need sparks a conversation. And that is how truthful conversations **often** start - from a place of reciprocal vulnerability, from a space that recognizes that each party risks being **known** and being **seen**.

**Questions are also critical to conversation** - especially with strangers. And the woman had **many questions** - **thoughtful** questions - questions that **mattered** and lead Jesus to reveal to her who he really was. Jesus **affirmed** her in her questioning, even **inviting** her inquiries. You see, **it's never wrong to**

**ask questions** - of humans or of God - because it is **questions** (and the honest **answers** to those questions) that **strengthen relationships**.

Neither the Samaritan woman nor, I suspect, Jesus expects to be profoundly **changed** by this encounter, **but they are**. The woman at the well goes from **shamed** to **witness**, from **dismissed** to **disciple**, from **alone** to being a **sheep** of Jesus' own fold. Her life **shifts**, claimed now for the **kingdom** that Jesus has come to enact. She was an **outsider**, but no longer. She was **alone**; now she is part of the family of God, gifted and welcomed with living water.

Here's what we **learn** from this story: when it comes to having a conversation with Jesus or about Jesus, **expect to be surprised**. Expect God to **reveal** something about God's self that you have never seen before. The unnamed woman at the well is the first one to whom Jesus **reveals** his true **identity** - I AM, the first absolute I AM uttered in the Gospel of John. He does this not to the **Jewish leaders** or to the **disciples**, but to **her** - a religious, social, political **outsider**. **This is whom God is for** because God loves the **whole** world.

There is a **deeper** reminder here, however, one that pierces our **preconceived notions** of God's love. We are reminded that the love of God in Christ Jesus is for **all people**, especially those who have **yet to hear** these saving words of Jesus. This story reminds us that there are **still** people at the well in the midday heat - those written off by society, those looking **in** from the **outside**. The gospel drives us **toward them** with a word of hope that **transcends** race, gender, nationality, marital status, and anything else that the world would use to **separate** us. **In Christ, all such divisions are transcended and healed**. We are sent simply to those who yearn to have their long thirst satisfied.

**As children of God we are called to invite others to these life-giving, life-changing baptismal waters**. We are called to share with them that they are not alone. **They are loved** - by God and by us.

A simple conversation - that may be all that it takes to make a stranger come to know **us**, and to know **Jesus**. Can **you** be the one who invites them to "Come and see"? AMEN