

March 12, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Third Sunday in Lent** ~

"We worship God in Spirit and Truth!"

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: John 4 v 4-30 and 39-42

I. Introduction:

I'm not sure about you, but I am so ready for a little warmer weather. I am ready to enjoy the mild sun of Spring on my face, ready to sit outside, take walks and enjoy new life emerging from the dormancy of winter. But more, I am so ready to sit around a fire outside in the mild, cool air, having good conversations and watching the stars! Now, I have never sat around a well. Have you? Do our modern wells have the kind of setting where one would sit around and talk about this and that? Not really, right? Our house wells are very different from the wells during Jesus' time or in other settings where people would come and gather and talk about this and that and get their water. Let's have a look at our passage between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well during the middle of the day, when they got involved in a very interesting conversation!

II. The drama at the well

In order to understand this conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, it is important to be reminded of the relationship between the Samaritans and the Jews during the time of Jesus. The hostility between the two groups goes back to the period when the Assyrians took the people of the Northern Kingdom, or Samaria as it became known, into exile, and many across Assyria migrated into Samaria and settled there. They also brought their own religious beliefs and practices with them. Those who settled in Samaria, called themselves Samaritans and when the Jews returned to Samaria from exile, it became evident that their deeply held religious beliefs would become a barrier between them. As an example, the Samaritans refused to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, but instead at their own temple on the Mountain of Gerizim in Samaria. There were other issues that led to deeper hostilities and divisions between the two groups.

So, here we find Jesus at the well of Jacob in Samaria, thirsty and resting, taking a break from His travels from Judea to Galilee through Samaria. He saw the Samaritan woman drawing water from the well and requested that she give Him some. Instead of giving Him water, she pointed out their differences in culture, that it would be unheard of for a Jewish person to talk to a Samaritan, and for a man and a woman to have a conversation in such a public place. This first scene in this drama between Jesus and this woman is all about water. We see Jesus turning the conversation about water that quenches the physical thirst into what He has to offer her, that is, living water. The living water He had to offer, He says, would be like a spring welling up in her and give eternal life. His living water will never thirst, while the water from this well will never stop their thirst. She would have to come back to this well again and again to fetch her water. It is understandable that what He was saying, referring to the Holy Spirit as the Living water, did not make sense to this woman, who came from far in the middle of a hot day to get water for her home. This is how she responded, "What are You talking about, Sir? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who built this well? You don't even have your own equipment to draw from this deep well!" But then she became curious about this living water which would help her, so she would not have to walk so far to get water from this well. "Sir, give me some of this water you are talking about..."

III. Worship God in Spirit and in truth

Her eyes were still not fully opened yet by His talk of living water, so Jesus changed the subject. While He was really thirsty, and needed water desperately, He saw an opportunity greater than His physical needs, and that was to open up a conversation with this Samaritan woman, whom He thought needed to hear who He truly was, the Messiah. So, He started talking about her life, and said, "Go call your husband...I have no husband...yes, I know...you had five and one now who is not legitimately yours", and so forth. One would think Jesus could have been a little more sensitive, right? Or maybe, John, the Gospel narrator, could have selected some other personal issue about this woman, but here we are! The point is, Jesus is touching on something she didn't think He would know, because who would have told Him, a stranger, about her personal life? He obviously succeeded somehow in breaking through her serious lack of awareness of who He truly is. Her

response is matter of fact, "Sir, I can see You are a prophet." She became a bit confrontational or defensive perhaps, "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews claim that the place we must worship is Jerusalem." She successfully changed the subject, from her personal life to the controversial issue of worshipping at their respective temples.

Then the drama takes us to the core of Jesus' message. "There comes a time when you will worship my Father not on this mountain or in Jerusalem...a time has come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth," He says to her. She is still not fazed by these words and keeps going with her own set of beliefs. "I know that the Messiah is coming, and when He comes, He will explain everything to us", she says. Then comes the big disclosure from Jesus, "I who speak to you am He, the Messiah." What a drama, and what a dramatic moment! At this point her eyes finally started to open for who this person might be...he knew about her personal life, and... the way He talks... maybe He is a prophet, or maybe He is the Christ? This was her testimony when she rushed back to her town and told her people about her encounter at the well.

This drama concludes with the Samaritans inviting Him to stay with them for a few days. He told them things they didn't know about. He sat with them and ministered to them. He came into their homes and opened His heart towards them, and they found themselves being open for His message, which is to worship God in spirit and in truth. This worship is more than offering sacrifices on Mount Gerizim, or at the temple in Jerusalem. It is about worshipping God who is in heaven, whose Son He is and Who is also Holy Spirit with them, giving them new life, and a deep relationship with God. In addition, He came to bridge cultural differences, and included them into His own life, and they did too. Their relationship was healed. For Him there were no more divisions between Jews and Samaritans. In His eyes they were one. What an awesome experience!

IV. Conclusion:

I am wondering this morning, whether we as a congregation during this third week of Lent, could reflect on this Samaritan woman, who becomes an instrument in Christ's hands to speak to her own people, but also to us about how we think about Him in our own lives. He

reached into her personal life and turned it upside down. He opened her mind and her heart and her soul. Their back-and-forth conversation led to something deeper... He became the Messiah for her and her community. He made them feel respected, and He gently led them to the spiritual realities of what it means to worship God. God is beyond this or that place, so worshipping God cannot be restricted to a specific temple or church. God is beyond the divisions that existed between them and us now and wants to bridge those divisions and focus on the spirit of God and the truth of God, which is about love and respect and unity and togetherness. What an awesome message to reflect on, maybe not at a well, but somewhere where you love to gather and talk to your loved ones. I hope that this Samaritan woman's conversation with Christ would bring us ever closer to Christ, to God, and to each other, in all our commonalities and our differences. May God bless us as we reflect on this, this week. Amen