

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *I Thirst*

### Sermon Reflection Notes

When we compare the Gospel lesson from last week to the one from this week, there are some marked differences. Last week, we heard about a man named Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council, who came to Jesus at night with some questions. This week we heard the story of the Samaritan woman at the well around noon who met Jesus. Nicodemus, as a man of religious training, had community standing, authority, and power. The Samaritan woman had nothing, no husband, no power, not even a name recorded in scripture, and as a Samaritan, she would have socially detestable. No one of good standing in the Jewish community would have spoken with her. When reading the Gospel of John, we have to remember there is usually another layer (or three) to consider; in this case, the timing of the encounters with Jesus was also a difference to note. Nicodemus came at night, under the cover of darkness. Could it be that despite his training and status, Nicodemus was one of those who “walks at night because the light is not in him?” The Samaritan woman met Jesus in the middle of day, in the light; could it be that the light was already within her?

Both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman have discussions with Jesus, and both of them take Jesus a bit too literally. They both mistake what Jesus offers for something tangible, something familiar: actual birth or actual water. The encounter with the woman begins with Jesus asking her for a drink. It’s a deceptively simple request with radical consequences. The very fact that Jesus asked this no-name, Samaritan woman for water is radical. The fact that Jesus believed this woman, with no standing or value in her own society, had something to offer him, is radical. The fact that Jesus offered *her* living water is radical. This story is often told with an overtone of condemnation for the woman; she had five previous husbands and wasn’t married to the man she currently had. But note, Jesus never condemns her. He saw her. He valued her, and he demonstrated that she had something to offer. Pastor Ron suggested the exchange between the two had subtext: Perhaps Jesus was really saying “I know you are thirsty, I know you are sidelined for many reasons and looking for security in a world that keeps you on the margins—but I’ll sit here with you.” The walls society put between them broke down. She found her voice and debated theology with Jesus. And when she said that she had heard the messiah was coming and would explain all this, Jesus flat out told her “I am he.” It’s remarkable...so remarkable the woman left her jug of water at the well and ran to tell others to ‘come and see, come see this guy who knows everything about me; he might just be the messiah.’

Many of us might be more like Nicodemus than the Samaritan woman. We come to Jesus, we ask questions, we want to walk in the light, but we don’t want to risk our security, we don’t want our stable worlds to come undone. It’s harder to go to Samaria, speaking metaphorically, and sit at the well with Jesus. It’s hard to have conversations with people who are diametrically opposed to us, like the Samaritan woman and Jesus. And yet, she shows us that faith is about dialogue, about growth, about change. Faith is about knowing there are differences between us. Are we brave enough to ask questions in the light of day, to lean into the idea that we have nothing to lose and everything to gain if we leave our security and

comfortable lives behind? Are we ready to go to the places we feel uncomfortable and ask the difficult questions without easy answers?

That is the posture we need to find living water, to find Jesus, to find God who answers the prayer of Psalm 51 to 'create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within.'

## Scripture

*John 4:5-42*

<sup>5</sup> So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" <sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." <sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." <sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,' <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" <sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" <sup>28</sup> Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup> "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" <sup>30</sup> They left the city and were on their way to him.

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." <sup>32</sup> But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." <sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. <sup>35</sup> Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for

harvesting. <sup>36</sup>The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. <sup>37</sup>For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' <sup>38</sup>I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

<sup>39</sup>Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." <sup>40</sup>So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup>And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup>They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the major differences between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well? Why did/do these differences matter?
2. Pastor Ron mentioned that it might be significant that Nicodemus sought Jesus in the night, in the dark, while the Samaritan woman met Jesus during the light of day. What difference, symbolically or metaphorically, might the time of day and presence/absence of light make?
3. There was a story in the sermon about a boy with Cerebral Palsy meeting Mr. Rodgers who asked the boy to pray for him. What is the significance of that story? Why tell it with this particular scripture?
4. What is faith?
5. What helps faith grow and thrive? What makes it wither?
6. Pastor Ron said he wonders if we can become uncomfortable, if we will choose to go to places that create discomfort. He said he hopes we can be physically safe and theologically challenged. What might it mean to be theologically challenged? What might that look like?

## Closing Prayer

We tell our stories, O God, about you providing water in the wilderness, about you giving us the living waters of baptism, about your gift of life offered with unconditional love, mercy, and grace. We look, though, in the wrong places and to the wrong people to fill our need to belong and to be loved. Today, help us to see you hidden in plain sight. Help us to see you in the stranger, in the one who is hurting, in the child, in the one who is not often including among us. Wake us up to remember that you are often in plain sight, in a still small voice, in an intuitive thought. Bring us to find Jesus in the daylight hours, waiting for us to show up beside a well in an uncomfortable place. It is in his name we pray. Amen.

*"Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me."*