

More than a Prophet — Rev. Denise Stone

Text: John 4:1-42

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 02-21-2021

Today is the second Sunday of Lent and we are continuing our journey through the Gospel of John as we are looking ahead to Holy Week and Easter. Last Sunday we saw the encounter of Jesus with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, who came to visit Jesus at night.

We move from Jerusalem to the town of Sychar in Samaria. There Jesus meets an unnamed, Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well around noon.

Hear our Second Scripture Reading for today from the Gospel of John, Chapter 4, verses 1-42:

¹ Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" ² —although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— ³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴ But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to 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 Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common 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 no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 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 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. 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” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷ 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?” ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the

people, ²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” 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 what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”ⁱ

The Word of the Lord, **Thanks Be to God**

Perhaps you’re already familiar with this story. There are many things that happen in this encounter between this woman and Jesus, not to mention with the disciples and the other people from Sychar.

There is an extended discourse about the water from Jacob's Well and the living water that Jesus offers. Certainly, a different kind of discussion about water than we just saw in the Exodus passage a few minutes ago.

For a few minutes this morning, let us consider this woman and what she learns from Jesus and how she allows that information to transform her into one of the first recorded missionaries found in the Gospels.

After learning that the Pharisees have become aware of Jesus' following in Jerusalem and beyond, Jesus and his disciples head to return back to Galilee. Most Jews would have avoided the most direct route to Galilee to avoid any contact with the Samaritans. (The root of the conflicts between the Jews and the Samaritans are a topic for another time). Jesus, however, intentionally goes through Samaria.

When we get to Chapter 4 in John, we find Jesus tired from his journey, sitting at Jacob's Well while his disciples have gone into town to get food.

It is midday and a woman comes to the well with her jar to draw water. We do not know why the woman comes at noon, nor do we really know anything of substance about her, other than what Jesus will reveal during his conversation with her.

Given the number of husbands she has had, commentators throughout history have speculated that she was a woman of "loose morals." However, the text does not tell us that. There is no mention of her sins nor does Jesus offer her forgiveness

during this encounter. It is possible that she has done nothing wrong regarding her lifestyle. Perhaps this is a situation of Levirate marriage, where if a spouse dies, she becomes the wife of the husband's brother. We **do** know that she is certainly well-versed in the history of her faith as evidenced by her conversation with Jesus.

Let me encourage you, and this applies to any biblical text you are reading, to focus primarily on the information found in the text, rather than many preconceived ideas you may bring to the story and to the people in it.

Back to the text.

As the woman arrives at the well, Jesus asks her for a drink of water. This is a shocking situation for the woman. First, a man is speaking to her. That would not have happened in most circumstances. Second, she observes that he is Jewish. Jews, as already pointed out, tried to avoid contact with Samaritans. Asking for a drink of water from a Samaritan woman just wouldn't have been done.

This set of circumstances set the stage for the initial portion of the encounter. It is this first section of the story that I want us to really hone in on.

We have this discussion about the water...

⁹ 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.) 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 no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ 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.”

As was the case with Nicodemus last week, this woman hears Jesus’ words, but hears them literally. She was not prepared to see the deeper meaning to his words. Nevertheless, she continued the conversation.

Look at verses 16-19,

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

Jesus is getting personal. She tries to change the subject. “Sir, I see you are a prophet.”

Nothing like a good theological debate to deflect from personal issues and situations.

The woman continues with the conversation,

²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 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 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Look closely at the next two verses.

²⁵ 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.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

The NRSV add the pronoun “he” in verse 26. It is not there in the Greek. Jesus is proclaiming that he is “I am” – the self-designation of God to Moses and the early Israelites.

Wow.

Sit with that a moment.

This woman, who is waiting for the Messiah, the Christ, has just met him.

We are told in verses 28-30 that this woman leaves her water jar at the well and heads back into the city and that the people head out to the well to see for themselves.

She said to the people, ²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

She is the first person recorded to have shared the good news of the Gospel with a larger group of people. How do we get there?

Let’s go back to the last words we hear in this woman’s voice in the text, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

She knows about her faith; she knows what she and others are looking for. Unexpectedly, she finds what is sought.

She is just going about her day. She is off to get some water from the well just outside her city. Unexpectedly, her life is transformed. And not just her life – the life of many around her – because of her initial sharing of what happened in her encounter with Jesus.

This Samaritan woman's conversation and interaction with Jesus was an interruption in her day. It most certainly was not something SHE planned. It did change the course of her day and presumably, her life.

One of the things that I have learned over the years, is that ministry most often happens in the interruptions.

I can plan my day to accomplish certain things for my position as your Pastor, but more often it is in a phone call or a chance encounter that I see the opportunity to point someone towards God. That is the most important thing we can do – to point people towards God.

Nothing you or I say will ever convince someone else that God exists or that God loves them. We are called to plant the seed. We are called to show the potential of the journey. It is God and the Holy Spirit that will do the heavy lifting of transforming lives.

We must first be willing to engage with God ourselves.

That is the lesson of Nicodemus from last week and from this unnamed woman this week. Both engaged in conversation with Jesus. We know less of the outcome of Nicodemus' conversation than we do of this woman's. In both cases, however, we see growth and progress.

Nicodemus' growth appears to have taken a long time before he comes out of the shadows and is shown to be a follower of Jesus. This woman doesn't **TELL** the people in her town that

she found the Messiah – she asks them to come and see for themselves.

I can tell you the stories of my life where I encountered God. But those are my stories. They will probably not convince anyone else of the existence of God or of the power of God in my life. What I can do is invite you to “come and see for yourself.”

You can tell the stories of your life where you encountered God. Those are your stories. And like mine, they will probably not convince anyone else. What you can do is invite others to “come and see for themselves.”

This woman experienced Jesus, the Christ. She allowed this experience to change her. She invited others to come and see for themselves.

Verses 39-42 tell us,

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” 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 what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

All of us who follow Jesus Christ are to invite others to “come and see and hear for themselves.”

There is no better time than now.

Pray with me.

Into the daily cycle of our lives,
When all seems well
With us and with the world,
When our yoke is easy
And the burden light,
You break in,
And scatter our complacency.

Into the daily cycle of our lives,
When we are comfortable
And at our ease,
When the fire is lit,
But eyes are closed,
You break in,
And challenge our dependency.

You break into
Our daily prayers,
Humble hearts,
Lay souls bare,
You break in,
You break in.

You break in
When defences are down,

With an Angel's shout,
Or the quietest sound,
You break in,
You break in.

And we change,
And all things change,
When you break in.ⁱⁱ

O Holy God – break in this day we pray, Amen!

ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ https://www.faithandworship.com/Prayers_Encounters_with_God.htm#gsc.tab=0.