

Title: Coming to Believe and Know the Gift of God

Subtitle: Finding the refreshing water the life.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/dFS7gt9wcDw>

Both this week and last week, we have for us two of the most intriguing personal encounters that Jesus ever had. Last week's Gospel featured Nicodemus, a man of high social and moral standing. Today, we have a Samaritan woman whose lifestyle had earned her a deeply frowned upon reputation. Her five divorces and present living arrangement with a man to whom she was not married put her outside the morally acceptable bounds of her day.

Once, as a hospice chaplain, I encountered a woman who thought that finding peace with God was something totally beyond her reach. She confided in me that she was raised a Roman Catholic, but due to three divorces before the age of 25, she hadn't been to Church for over 65 years.

She shared how her dad had died when she was young, and her mother remarried a man who was abusive to her mother and herself. In desperation, she left home at the age of 16. It wasn't long before she hooked up with a man and, within a year, was pregnant. She married the father of the child when she was 17. That marriage lasted a little more than a year. On the rebound, she married someone again at 19. That marriage lasted only two years. Again, at 23, she married for the third time, which ended two years later. In her mind, she was a moral failure and a hopeless cause. Not only did the Church she was raised in condemn divorce, she now had three strikes, which threw her completely out of the game. By the way, her fourth marriage at

the age of 28 was happy, lasting over 55 years until her husband died when she was in her eighties.

When I told her the story about Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well, where Jesus offered the gift of eternal life to a woman who had been married five times, and the man she was living with was not even her husband, she couldn't believe it. In fact, she said, I won't believe that story is in the Bible unless you show it to me. When I opened the Bible and read her the story, she was astonished. She said, "You mean I have been avoiding the Church for all these years over something that is untrue!"

Then I told her there was more to that story than just the offer of forgiveness. When Jesus first encountered this woman, there were many social barriers he had to breach. Jews had no dealings with Samaritans, and men weren't supposed to talk to women (other than their wives). As a result, Jesus endured misunderstandings and unspoken judgments about this encounter, even from his most devoted followers.

As the story unfolds, Jesus describes the truth to this hurting soul by gently starting with a symbol of water and the shared human experience of thirst.

When she responded, "Sir, give me this water so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."¹ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here. The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus told her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five

¹ John 4:15

husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. Therefore, what you have said is true.”²

Remarkable! He doesn’t give a little sermon about the wrongfulness of her lifestyle or any such thing except to say that he knows what her life has been like. In other words, now that we both know it, let’s talk about your heart’s real thirst since the life you have chosen doesn’t seem to be working.

Without the awkward details of the woman’s history coming to light, we would only have an esoteric mystical dialogue about truth and enlightenment, illustrated by the symbols of water and thirst. But with this acknowledgment of sin, we have a reality check that brings with it both conviction and salvation. When Jesus welcomes and accepts this woman, it is not because he winks at sin or is soft on sin. He took sin so seriously that he died on the cross to pay its penalty.

Therefore, despite this woman’s lifestyle, which had broken the laws of marriage with its prohibitions against adultery, Paul’s letter to the Romans states, “now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God was being disclosed.”³ Paul further clarifies, “a righteousness from God through faith in Jesus Christ is available to all who believe.”⁴ “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵

² John 4:16-18

³ Romans 3:21

⁴ Romans 3:22

⁵ Romans 5:1

This peace and reconciliation that is offered are truly awesome. The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman turns out to be a love story, after all, for only the one who knows you completely and not as you pretend to be, is the only one who truly loves you and knows your deepest desires. Now, because of Jesus Christ, we can say that we know real love, not make-believe love, but a love that boasts, “He told me everything I ever did.”⁶

Once this woman realizes that Jesus sees right into her heart with no hidden secrets, the conversation takes on a new sense of honesty. She recognizes that Jesus is a prophet and begins to ask more profound questions about life and spirituality. Her inquiries included, “Where should we worship, and who is right about where they worship, the Jews or the Samaritans?”

But notice how tender and patient he is with her. He said, *“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.”*⁷

This woman is so overjoyed at this news that she can hardly wait to share her experience with others. Then returning to her hometown, she says, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” Here is a man who doesn’t care about race or gender, and he doesn’t let things like my wrong ideas about religion stop him from loving me. He has seen me to the bottom yet has loved

⁶ John 4:29

⁷ John 4:23

me to the skies. This is what I have always longed for and wanted. You have got to come and meet him for yourself.

Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus extends the offer to anyone who realizes that their life isn't touching their deepest desire when he cries out, ***“If you are thirsty, come to me! If you believe in me, come and drink! For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow out from within”*** (John 7:37-38).

In contrast to this refreshing message, the Jews of his day were practicing a very soul-killing spirituality, a lifeless religion of duty and obligation. They had abandoned God's offer and replaced it with knowledge about their traditions and rules. The synagogue was the place to go to learn how to get with the program. No wonder they feared Jesus. He came along and started appealing to what people really hungered and longed for.

To the weary, Jesus speaks of rest. To the lost, he tells of finding your way. Again and again, Jesus takes people back to the source of living water. For “God proved his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”⁸ It is through him “we have obtained access into this grace in which we now stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”⁹ This love story never ceases to amaze, for it will never end. *Amen.*

⁸ Romans 5:8, Berean Standard Bible Translation

⁹ Romans 5:2