

March 15, 2020

Ex 17:3-7; Rom 5:1-2,5-8; Jn 4:5-42 (l or s??)

The meeting of Jesus and the woman at the well tells us a lot about who Jesus is, and also some practical understanding about how Jesus can and should be a part of our life. We can get caught up in the worries of the day - maybe whooped up by the hysteria over coronavirus or the fear of running out of toilet paper - this can distract us from the realities of a God who is very real, very powerful, and very ready to care for us. We can look to our own powers, we can look to the temporary things of the world - but the lasting source of peace and fulfillment is found in Jesus Christ. It is the spiritual things that Jesus provides that make a difference in life.

I have a friend who is spiritually bankrupt, although he has lots of money and power. He mocks God, he gets a laugh at the expense of those who care about him - because of what he is missing, his life is much more hollow than he realizes. Without Jesus involved, the solutions we come to for our thirsts are all as temporary in their satisfaction as the water the woman came to get from the well. Jesus says: *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* Jesus is pointing to not just the woman's need for a drink, but of deeper spiritual needs. He says that he is the source of a spring that provides a different kind of water, not the H₂O that we need to physically survive, but another water that brings spiritual soothing and eventually eternal life. The exchange between the woman and Jesus tells a few things. First that Jesus is the source of something that we cannot get on our own - just like the woman could not find the water he was talking about in that well - it had to be placed in her by him. Secondly, Jesus clearly states that he is the Messiah - he is the one who saves. He is the one that can take us from the things that bind us, be they oppressions, sickness, addictions, doubt, slavery to public opinion, or fear - even more, he is the one who can lead us to eternal life.

Another important thing to see is how this meeting takes place. This woman comes out at midday to get water. This is not when woman would have come to gather water. They would have come out early in the day to have water for all the daily tasks and also to avoid the heat of the sun. It was a time for the women to meet and socialize with each other. But this woman's marital and living situation would have made her ritually unclean. She is living with a man who is not her husband - and for them - that was a major cause for concern. It is likely that the other

woman would have avoided her so that they did would become ritually unclean themselves and spread this impurity to the whole family. In addition, we learn that she had been divorced multiple times. Remember that at this time in history it was the man who decided on the divorce and it would be because the wife “displeased” him. It is likely that this woman was not the most agreeable person, all the town knew her shame, and at this point she was a social outcast.

The response that she would expect from Jesus as she approached would be to avoid her too. On top of all the things about her, she was a Samaritan who practiced an illicit and often idolatrous form of worship and any good Jew, like Jesus, would avoid her. She is ritually impure because she is a Samaritan, she is ritually unclean as an adulterer, she is off limits to speak to because of social conventions. But Jesus asks her for water. He will use the dipper that he could “catch” the impurity from - he is not afraid, he will speak to her and risk guilt by association to a “loose” woman - he is not afraid. He is open to reach out to a person who is empty. This openness he shows, and offer of “living water,” prompts her own openness. When she asks for this water from him he asks her to get her husband. He is giving her the chance to be honest to him, and she is ... *I do not have a husband*. He offers his gift, she asks for it, he approaches her despite her faults, she responds to him with honesty. This is a model of how to interact with Jesus who comes to us today in the Eucharist and agrees to touch us despite our sins and failings, who offers to us the font of living spiritual water welling up from that Eucharist inside us. we may want to distance ourselves from Jesus because of our failings, doubts, or hurts, but we should come to Jesus here and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation being as open the woman was.

Jesus provides for us each day more than we know. Our first reading speaks about God giving water to the Israelites in the desert. We ask, as they did, for the practical needs we have - and God provides these (more than we give God credit for, by the way), but there is more to be had. St. Paul tells us that there was a spiritual nourishment hidden inside that water in the desert, just as there is a spiritual reality hidden in the physical appearances of bread and wine in the Eucharist. My friend once knew this, but his own pain and fear has caused him to dig into poisoned ground for water - it meets his immediate thirst, but it is spiritually toxic. Just as Jesus offered to provide the outcast woman the gift of eternal life, he offers this lasting sustenance to us as well. We must open in faith, not be held back by pain and fear, and be willing to follow him drinking from the font as we go through this life. It is this font that he tells us will meet our deeper needs, and eventually well up to eternal life for the one who opens to him.