

Third Sunday of Lent

I grew up in a family of mechanics. My dad was a mechanic. My uncle Burl was a mechanic. Two of my cousins, Bob and Mike were mechanics. In Tipton, it was what the Days did.

Bob is the one who carrying on the tradition more than anyone. When he and Mike sold their Marathon station to make room for US-31, it wasn't long before Bob had converted his garage at home into a shop where he could continue to work on cars.

It's very hard for him to drive past someone on the side of the road with car trouble without stopping to see whether he can take care of the problem.

It's what he does. It's in his nature.

Although we often refer to today's Gospel as "the woman at the well" I think a more telling title would be "the nature of God." The story is an invitation to reflect on who God is by his very nature and how that plays out in how he interacts with us.

There are so many reasons in the story why the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well should not have happened—at least by the

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standards of the conventions of the day: 1) he was in Samaritan country and there was long-standing animosity between Jews and Samaritans; 2) he was not from around there; 3) men in that culture were not to speak to unaccompanied women.

None of that keeps Jesus from acting according to his nature and doing what he does. In his very bones he knows that the kingdom of God is meant for everyone and the deep desire he shares with the Father is that nothing be considered too high a barrier for people to be incorporated into it.

Who Jesus is leads to him initiating a conversation that will lead to salvation. This story is all about God.

One of the most telling aspects of the story for me is actually the thing Jesus tells his disciples. The conversation he has with the Samaritan woman, because it has led to her gradual acceptance of him as the savior of the world, in spite of the barriers that might have thwarted that, has given Jesus what he lives for. He calls it “food of which the disciples do not know.”

It’s something similar, although much more profound, to what happens when my cousin Bob is

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able to help someone by looking under the hood and discovering what the problem is and fixing it and getting the people back on the road.

The nature of God is to be living water for us, to take the initiative, to look for ways to overcome whatever keeps us from being nourished by it, to not be put off by our resistance but to keep at it until we have to admit to ourselves that our various attempts to save ourselves have come up empty. Then we are ready for the salvation God has prepared for us from the beginning of the world.

At some level we already know this. We already have an affinity for it in the ways we want to be in the world.

Michael, you know that coaching is about way more than winning the game. The game is the vehicle for forming young people for life. The deeper satisfaction comes more from seeing that happen more than from beating the archrival at the buzzer.

Nicole, I know you see your career in journalism as much more than getting time in front of the camera. It's how you see yourself contributing to making the world a place where peace and justice are served and things get better.

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There's a deep desire in each of you that can only be explained as the call of God.

In both of your cases God did not wait. He sought you out, drew you in by bonds of love and offered you living water to quench that unnamed thirst for him that can be satisfied in no other way.

That's just how God is. It's just what God does. Who would not want to put down their empty jars and run to tell the others?

That's how it works for all of us, even if we have forgotten that from time to time.

In this Lenten season we give ourselves the chance to pull away from all the "masters" that promise much but deliver nothing, so that we can commit ourselves again at the Easter Vigil when we actually come up to the font, and at the other Masses on Easter Sunday, when we connect again to the living water found there.

We make our baptismal promises to seek our salvation only in God. He alone can provide it.