

## **SAMARITAN WOMAN:**

Today's gospel is a departure from Mark; and for the next 3 weeks as we enter with our newly-elect into a deeper understanding of who Jesus is for us - we'll hear John's voice, uniquely focused as it always is, on Jesus as Divine. For John, there is a direct line between Jesus and God.

John shows Jesus in relationship, always drawing out what is most genuine in the people he meets.

I want to invite you, as my favorite scripture scholar, my teacher/mentor and master storyteller John Shea invited me to do years ago: to use your imagination, and explore with me the potential John's story has to bring us some new awareness -- the "more than meets the eye" in the story of the Samaritan Woman.

Because of my theatrical background, I can't help considering the context in which the story takes place. So it's helpful to know that before the curtain rises on our scene at the well that

- 1) John contrasts the Samaritan Woman with Nicodemus in chapter 3.
- 2) Nicodemus, a person of some social stature, comes in the dead of night to seek out the rabbi, which although it was culturally acceptable in that day, in John speaks to a certain unwillingness in Nicodemus to risk/jeopardize his privileged status; and Jesus also

challenges his lack of understanding regarding baptism.

On the other hand, Our Woman is someone who has nothing to lose and everything to gain. She meets Jesus in the brightness of noon day - our cue from John that what is about to unfold is illuminating, clarifying something of who Jesus is. The woman is about to have an epiphany: a private revelation in a public place.

- II. John begins the story telling us that Jesus took a direct route, when other "good" rabbis would've gone out of their way to avoid Samaria, and alerting us to the fact that something extraordinary is about to happen. I interpret this to mean Jesus intends to cut right to the heart of the matter.

III. The Samaritan Woman is a real "character" - and I mean that in the nicest possible way! I imagine she may have come from a distance [as women do today in Latin America, the Near East and Africa walking miles to draw water to run their homes and care for their families] to approach the well, and perhaps she even glimpsed Jesus from a little ways off. She is streetwise and quick-witted, she may recognize from his appearance he's a Jew - wondering whether he's crazy since he's resting by this holy place usually dominated by women - when other men probably kept a respectful distance,

sometimes furtively glancing over at their wives and daughters, future brides and mother-in-laws as they talked, laughed or sang, made community by their common task. Or more importantly, did the woman wonder whether she might be in any physical danger? But she keeps coming on...

She's initially sarcastic, but as Jesus continues to engage her in conversation, she shows herself to be honest -- And Yes(!) INFORMED, which is quite possibly why Jesus spends so much time with her in what is the longest exchange recorded in the New Testament.

IV. Jesus dialogues with this woman and finds in her a worthy partner as they argue the ritual and historical differences that have evolved since Solomon's time [ i.e. Assyrian occupation and its implications not only for religious dilution, but racial assimilation].

Yet we have tended to get stuck on her marital status. Although Jesus mentions it, even he doesn't dwell on it, but uses it to leverage his own credibility; to build intimacy with her.

She's a woman with a past (like me). She has regrets (like me). She has baggage!!! Who doesn't ? !

This Woman is, like me, about so much more than meets the eye...

So she comes center stage not merely another "bad girl of the bible" but as a seeker; that she appears without a name is our clue that she is a stand-in for us. That's why we need to pay attention, read between the lines; to connect our own experiences to her story.

My particular connection to this scripture comes not only because it shows how God is revealed in every day life - how if we just keep 'showing up' as was our Woman's custom - something extraordinary can happen; but also to let us know that nothing can separate us from the Love of God.

In all my years of chaplaincy work I have found it to have the ring of truth. I believe that 'anything can happen at the Well'. Most recently, as I've spent weeks read/reflecting to prepare to tell her story, the memory of a particularly hard time in my own life kept bubbling up. It was a time when when I was wrung out, soul weary and empty: my soul was thirsting for the living God [Ps. 42]. I felt isolated, frustrated: how much longer I could keep throwing away time and energy into the music business. I had experienced a couple failed relationships. It was 1983, I was a lounge singer at Donald Trump's Boardwalk Casino in Atlantic City.

One night over too many martinis, I poured out my heart to a drummer friend (also playing in town). He and I always could talk about spiritual things. He listened. I talked. When I

was done, he simply said “have you ever thought of doing a retreat?” And I answered “not since high school”. So I made plans which ultimately led to my reserving retreat time in Guilford, CT at Mercy Center on Long Island Sound. It was February. I arrived on the doorstep after driving nearly 14 hours through a record-breaking blizzard. Mercy Center was for me a *well spring*.

Not only did I succeed in doing a five day silent retreat, but I met my first Spiritual Director, Sr. Patty Cook, RSM. By the time the retreat ended, I came to realize (as a songwriter friend of mine once said of Jesus) *‘what I wanted was a cool glass of water, and what I got was a waterfall’*. *There in the quiet, gazing through the chapel windows overlooking the water, I realized* that God had dreamed for me so much more than I had dreamed for myself.

Like our Woman, I left my empty jar [by the shores of Long Island Sound] like her I left with a newfound energy. I wouldn’t know the instant gratification she did, but I shared with close friends what happened. And this wellspring moment continues to be the most memorable of my conversion experiences. And ministry has led to my calling others to discipleship.

But what is even more mind-blowing to me about the story is that by the time the Apostles show up, Jesus says he has already eaten food of which they do not know, which leads

me to believe that God is as *moved*, as *filled up* and *touched* by personal encounter as we are. Remarkable!

And we will continue to Jesus deeply moved in the coming weeks: he will be moved by the man born blind; the death of Lazarus. He will weep over the city of Jerusalem.

Imagine!!!  
Our God is moved,  
Our God is for us.  
Is intimately connected to us.

Our God loves us, meets us where we are.

Our God loves us. Our God’s arms open between heaven and earth...