

This morning I want to invite you into reading this passage of Scripture in a way that, I hope, helps all of us better understand how to interpret Scripture. For this is a passage of Scripture which, in my opinion, has been misinterpreted by lots of preachers. This misinterpretation has led to a myth that has been passed down from generation to generation. I hope that you leave worship this morning having been challenged to read this text with some new eyes.

I am going to invite you to open up your Bibles and let's walk through this passage together. We've heard the young people read it for us but now it is time to delve into a deeper level.

The story begins in verse 4 when we are told that "Jesus had to go through Samaria." Samaria was a region between Judea and Galilee and was inhabited by people that the Jewish people in Jerusalem described as less than Jewish. They were not pure Jewish people. They were mixed race people. They were considered outsiders, "less than" people. They would be people from the neighborhood near you that you describe as having something less than you possess. Less income, less morals, less drive, less whatever.

We are told in verse 5 that Jesus comes into a city within Samaria and that he is thirsty and goes to the well in the center of the city. This is the place where people, usually the women, would come to fetch their ration of water for their home. While he is there, a Samaritan woman approaches Jesus and says, "give me some water."

But the woman is shocked that he would ask her for a drink. For in asking her for a drink, Jesus is breaking several taboos. He is a man and she is a woman. He is a Jew and she is a Samaritan. These were two barriers that the society says he is not to cross. But Jesus doesn't seem to be overly concerned by the cultural barriers. He reaches across the chasm.

Jesus then takes the conversation to a deeper level. He tells her, "If you knew who you were talking to you would ask for living water." Like Nicodemus that we read about last week, she misunderstands what he means by this and sees his response in a literal sense.

But Jesus says that anyone who drinks of this living water will never thirst again. For this water is water that gushes up to eternal life. But again she misunderstands what he means. She yearns for literal water so that she would not have to keep coming to this well to fetch water for survival. Her life is hard and she is looking for this man to make her life much easier.

When we move into verse 16, this is where this woman has been misunderstood by lots of readers of the Bible and preachers in particular. Jesus says to her to call her husband. She says she has no husband. Jesus then says she has had 5 husbands and the man she is living with now is not her husband.

This verse is the verse that many preachers and readers of the Bible have used to justify that this woman is a prostitute or a whore or any other type of term to degrade her. Many readers of the Bible have used this verse to dehumanize her. But this text doesn't say any of that. Jesus doesn't say anything about her being sinful for any reason. She may have had 5 husbands because they have died off. She may have had 5 husbands who quickly dismissed her by divorce because they didn't like something about her.

Remember, women were treated as property. She may be with a man who is not her husband because she is a slave or indentured servant or she has no other options. Too many readers of the Bible and preachers have used this verse to degrade her when nowhere does Jesus degrade her.

She says that Jesus must be a prophet because he gets her. He understands her. And then she asks a question that has also been misunderstood by lots of Bible readers. She then says to Jesus that our ancestors worshipped on this mountain but you say that the place where people should worship is in Jerusalem, which is it? Historically, many readers of the Bible accuse her of trying to change the subject. But she doesn't try to change the subject. In recognizing that he is a prophet, she asks him a question that is central to the Jewish faith. Where should we worship?

And Jesus tells her. Worship is not about a location. Worship is about Spirit and truth. Then she says I know the Messiah is coming who will pronounce all things to us. And then Jesus says an amazing thing. Jesus says I am he. "I am." "I am" is the name of God that is revealed to Moses in the burning bush. "I am" is what we translate Yahweh or Jehovah. I am your Messiah he tells her. She leaves her water jar and runs to tell the others about what she has seen.

He gets her. He offers her living water. He knows her secrets. He knows her life. He knows what satisfies her. He knows where she is frustrated. He knows her joys. He knows everything about her. He is a prophet. He is the Christ. And she recognizes that.

There is a website called postsecret.com. This website posts the secrets that people send in by email or by postcard. Some of the secrets that people have sent in include secrets such as:

I lied in court to help a friend.

Our marriage was over long before he deployed but no one will believe that it wasn't the distance that did us in.

Even vegetarians think of meat from time to time. I know that I do.

When I was 5 years old my mom made me report my Dad for molestation even though he never touched me. 3 years later he was denied custody and I was adopted by a man who did molest me.

The thing we find out from this story is that Jesus knows our secrets also. Whatever those secrets are. And we all have secrets. We have secrets that we have told no one. We have secrets within our families that we try to hide from the outside world. We have secrets in our past that we are ashamed to share with others.

We have secrets that we try to hide because they embarrass us in one way or another. Secrets concerning relationships, secrets concerning our parents or children. Secrets concerning something we did in the past that we have hidden from others.

Jesus knows our secrets. And knowing our secrets, Jesus offers us living water. He gets us. He knows us. He sees into us. And he offers us living water.

Session met last Sunday evening with two representatives from Providence Presbytery. Janet and Steve shared with us census data about folks in the immediate area around the church. There was one piece of information that stood out for me. Our area ranks higher than the national average when it comes to people yearning for spiritual development. When asked a question about what church program is most important to you, we in this area around ACPC ranked above the national average in people yearning for spiritual development. In other words, people in our area yearn for living water.

If Jesus knows us inside this building and offers us the living water of true relationship, that invite is also for people outside of this building. Just like that woman who left her water jar to tell others about the Messiah that she met, we too are invited to receive the living water from the Messiah and share that with the community around us. We are invited to be nourished so that we can offer that living water to every person yearning to connect with god but they don't know how.

Jesus knows us. He offers us living water. Jesus knows our neighbors. We have cups of living water to share with them. Amen.

-Text: John 4: 5-42

-Given: March 27, 2011 in Allison Creek Presbyterian Church (York, SC)