

John 4:5-42

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we

worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he,^[c] the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving^[e] wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.”

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.”

Today's Gospel reading covered a lot of ground. There's a lot of context behind this text, so let's get right to that. First, let's discuss the relationship between the Israelites and the Samaritans. It basically didn't exist, at least not in a good way. Jesus was travelling from Jerusalem to Galilee, and the road out of Jerusalem that Jesus started down specifically went all the way around Samaria. People of Israel did not go through Samaria.

The people of Samaria worshiped the same God, sure, but they held fast that Mt Gerazim was the place to worship God, and not Mt Zion and the temple that God built to be among his people. So, basically Israelites and Samaritans worshiped the same God in the same way that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. That is, they had some Scripture that they agreed on, but there were whole swaths of differences, to the point that you can no longer really say that they have the same God.

But when Jesus walks down the road out of Jerusalem, he turns off the well-worn path that leads around Samaria and instead heads through it. You can imagine the unease of his disciples. It would have felt like walking through a really dangerous neighbourhood in the middle of the night. It's not just a bad idea, you really don't feel welcome. We do have to give them some credit for the faith in Jesus, because they followed him even into Samaria. They even went into a Samaritan town to buy food!

And there in the heat of the middle of the day, a woman arrives. I'll cut to the chase. She's probably not well liked in town. She's been married five times. What happened to those husbands? Did they all die? Probably not... and now she's together with another man and she's not even married to him. The normal society in the town would shun her...and that is why she arrives so late, when no one else should be around.

But someone is there at the well. A man. An Israelite man. That's unexpected. That's...not how things work. A man and a woman don't hang around together by themselves. Especially not an Israelite and a Samaritan. But maybe she's used to the scorn and the mocking of the people in town. And perhaps the treatment she's

received has taught her how to defend herself if need be. Maybe she's shaking in her sandals. But she does need water to drink, and so she comes to the well where Jesus waits all the same.

Jesus ignores all social conventions and he strikes up a conversation. I won't repeat their conversation again, but in this short exchange Jesus breaks down barriers. He asks to share a drink with a woman from a group that he's supposed to avoid like the plague. He even offers her living water: the Word of God and true teaching that she's been missing all her life. He reveals to her explicitly that he is the Messiah. No parables, no fancy words. Oh, that Messiah who will proclaim all things to you? Yeah, I am him, me, the one speaking to you right now. You really can't get clearer than that.

That's just...amazing. And there's equally amazing things in the text, like how the woman who is an outcast goes back into the town and tells them about Jesus and they listen to her despite her low social status. And then these Samaritans invite the Israelite Rabbi and his disciples to stay with them in their town for two days. They listen to Jesus speak and teach and they don't rise up to stone him like some Israelite gatherings did. No, they *believe* in him. They recognise Christ as the Saviour of the world. That is amazing.

But I want to focus now on another barrier that Jesus breaks down in this text. It's this barrier that the Israelites and the Jews have about their understanding of worship and of God himself.

Jesus said to her "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

This congregation knows better than most that places and locations aren't the most important thing when we come and worship our Lord. This building is

lovingly built to aid us in our worship. So many aspects of the design are all there to point us to Christ, right there at the centre of the altar. There is great value in that, but ultimately it's just a building. It could burn down...and it has...and this congregation has and would again continue to worship in Spirit and in Truth.

We worship here and anywhere we are...in Spirit. We worship in the Holy Spirit that proclaims the life giving word of God to us. We worship full of faith that the Holy Spirit has given to us, and that the same Spirit continues to grow and nurture in us each and every day. And we worship in Truth. We worship in **the** Truth – the Son of God, the Word made flesh. We worship in Truth because we were baptised into the Truth, and now that Truth is within us. And as we worship in Spirit and in Truth, our Heavenly Father gives us his blessings and the promise of eternal life, so that we might be supported and sustained and be a blessing to those in our community.

With these simple words about worshiping in Spirit and in Truth, Christ broke down a barrier that the chief priests and Pharisees had been building up for quite some time. And it's a barrier we often put up as well. I speak of the understanding that God dwells specifically in buildings like churches or temples. Now God does dwell here. Our Lord promised that he would be here with us, for indeed wherever two or more gather in his name, there he is with them. But I hope and pray that each of you knows that this is just the tip of the iceberg.

God created the heavens and the earth. He didn't go on to create hundreds and thousands of tiny little buildings where his presence would dwell. When Isaiah was called to be a prophet of God he saw the Lord dwelling in the temple in Jerusalem, except it wasn't the Lord it was just the hem of his robe. How could a building ever contain the glory of God? It can barely contain the tiniest piece of God's glory!

And yet, the truth of the matter...the spirit of the matter...the spirit and truth of the matter...is that God did create of the heavens and the earth, and then did go on to create temples to dwell in. He created hundreds of them, thousands of them, millions of them...billions of them. God created humans, and he chose to dwell among them. And even when humans fell into sin he didn't abandon them.

He came and dwelt with them in a different way: in Jesus Christ. And then Christ died and rose again, conquering sin for our benefit. And from that point onward God dwelt among his people in another new way.

Christ spoke to the woman at the well of what was to come, this age that we now live in. We have received this promise, and the Spirit and the Truth now dwell within us. Though we are as unworthy as that Samaritan woman to approach Christ, or to receive this awesome gift, Christ comes to us all the same. He pours out living water upon us, and it becomes a spring within us that gushes forth to eternal life.

This Lenten Season, and indeed every day of your life, may our loving God lead you to worship in Spirit and in Truth. May he lead you to gather in his house that you may be served by him. But even more, may he direct you to worship in Spirit and in Truth with your word and your actions, in each and every moment of your life, in or outside of this building. May every person who comes before the temple of God that is your body, may each of them truly see that spring of living water within you that they might also drink and receive eternal life in Christ, to the Glory of our heavenly Father.

Amen.