

Homily – 3rd Sunday in Lent (A)

There is a story told of an old monk who one night in a dream was visited by the Risen Christ. They went on a walk together in quiet intimacy, enjoying each other's presence. Finally the old man turned to Jesus and asked:

"When you walked the hills of Palestine, you mentioned that one day you would come again in all your glory. Lord, it's been so long; when will you return for good?"

After a few moments of silence the Resurrected and Living One said,

"When my presence in nature all around you and my presence beneath the surface of your skin is as real to you as my presence right now, when this awareness becomes second nature to you, then I have returned for good."

You might say - what has that to do with today's Gospel? Well, everything!

You see - we have heard this story so often over the years and we listen again to the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.... so often the focus is on Jesus talking to a Samaritan and a woman and a sinner... and pointing to the way that Jesus is inclusive of everyone...

Yes, she is a Samaritan and a woman but I always bristle about the sinner part. After all, it was rare for a woman to divorce a man in this culture and there were two schools of thought about men divorcing women.

One was strict and allowed it if the woman was unfaithful to her husband.

The other was far more lenient....

perhaps she didn't get along with her mother-in-law.... they all lived together or close by.... maybe she wasn't a good cook.... I would have had trouble there...

or maybe she and the husband didn't get along...

So she has been divorced 5 times....

That means rejection and if that isn't enough... women had little to no means of support so without a husband or brother, circumstances could bring serious hardship.

That's why scripture is always advocating for widows and orphans.

If we look at the exchange she has with Jesus, we learn that she is very smart. She knows her political history - the centuries of hostility between the Jews and Samaritans.

She knows her cultural history - men don't speak with women in public.
She knows her theology.... obviously she has a real reverence for Jacob and
his place in the history of this very territory and people... AND
she is not afraid to stand up to anyone challenging all this!

Let's look at the exchange and see how it leads to the true substance of Jesus' message
and ties into the monk's dream.

First, she sees a man sitting on the well and knows there has to be an encounter...
she sees he is a Jew - this could be an insult, at best...

He asks for a drink!

Her surprise makes her wary - so she becomes assertive:

"How can you, a Jew, ask me a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"

Try to picture Jesus' demeanor - his face and manner when he answers her...

"If you knew the gift of God - and who is asking you for a drink...

You could ask him and he would have given you living water."

The woman knew this well was deep and the water within was not from a flowing stream...
so her comeback....

"You don't have a bucket and the cistern is deep...

where would you get this "living water"?"

Her love for her faith comes through when she stands a bit taller and adds...

*"Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this
cistern and drank from it himself - with his children and his flocks?"*

Picture Jesus' face - how he must have loved her - her spirit and her faith..

What did she see in his eyes?

He 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 them, a spring of water
welling up to eternal life."*

Her reaction is the kind you can have when you hear something too good to be true..and want it.

So she asks for this water - seeing only the initial benefits of not walking so far to get water...

Then we hear her personal story that Jesus reveals to her... and she is astonished...

Not wanting to dwell on her life of rejection, she moves the conversation to a higher

level and shows Jesus her knowledge of her faith and his...

She calls him a prophet... and tells him what her ancestors believed and what his ancestors believed.... We worship here - this place is sacred.
You worship in Jerusalem....

(Here it comes!)

"Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem! The hour is coming and is now here... when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth... Indeed, this is what the Father wants! God is Spirit and those who want to worship God need to understand they worship - not just in a place - but always in the Spirit and Truth!"

She is stunned!.... and then says... *"I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called "the Anointed;".... when that happens we will all understand."*
Jesus - looking at her with love and hope.... admits:

"I - the one who is speaking with you here - am he!"

At that point the disciples return and look askance at his speaking with this woman, while she- in amazement - hurries back to the town to tell everyone WHO is there!
Jesus probably watches her go - feeling elated.... She got it!

The disciples call him back with "Rabbi, here is lunch, eat."
Jesus says, *"I have food to eat of which you do not know."*

Have you ever had a time when - maybe as a teacher you watched a student 'light up' when they grasped what you were teaching?

Or

your son or daughter showing an amazing act of kindness when you didn't expect it?
Did you find yourself thinking: "Money can't buy this feeling!"

That's how Jesus felt - or something like that - she Got it.... when so often the disciples didn't - Now, he knew for her - that it was only an opening for all that was to come.... but it was an opening and she was willing to run and tell everyone to come and meet him and see for themselves.... which they did.... and convinced him to stay with them for a couple of days because they believed!

As we look back at that scene... let us try to realize the beginning of what they understood and what we have come to know...and are still growing to understand...

This Jesus - a truly human being - totally united with the Father - his Abba - showing us the potential we have - if we allow ourselves the freedom to accept - the Love God has for us --- and to let that direct our lives....

This Jesus is the Revelation of who God is and if we allow that Love to truly dwell in us - this is who we can become - whom we are called to become - why we are even created - for our unity in GOD, who is Spirit and Truth!

Sr. Barbara Fiand describes this in one of her books: *From Religion to Faith*
She says:

"Jesus was compassion beyond price and measure, unbounded mercy.
It was an acceptance and inclusion of all - saints and sinners alike -
the outcasts, the poor, women, yes, even prostitutes.
It was a rejection of oppression and oppressive systems of power, domination
and everything needed to keep control over others.
It was a love for peace, and passion, and tenderness.
It was unconditional forgiveness.
It was the protection of children, of the helpless and vulnerable.
It was a healing relationship to earth and all of creation.
It was the courage to stand for the vision of a better world
- the *reign of God* - even to the point of death."

.....
This is who dwells in *you* - - - longing for your love and faith...
All we need to do is to desire a greater awareness of this Presence in us --
this Presence in all people and in all creation!

In our world - in our country - in our state and city....
this is what is needed NOW! This is where God needs us!

We need to be united in Spirit and Truth with each other -
so that our awareness of the Presence of the Resurrected Living One
is second nature to us and can be seen Alive here and now!

When this happens we will know what Jesus told the old monk in his dream:
"Then, I have returned for good!"

