

Sermon Samaritan Woman

John 4:1 - 42 Mid-feast John 7:14 - 30
CHRIST IS RISEN !!!

He had to go through Samaria.

In the Feast of Mid-Pentecost at Vespers we read from Isaiah: “Ho ye that thirst, go to the water, and all that have no money, go; buy; eat and drink wine and fat without money or price.”

And in the oikos of the Kontakion we also heard: Thou didst bid all to come to Thee, All-holy Word of God: draw the water of immortality; it is Living Water.

He needs must go through Samaria. Most Jews of his day journeyed around Samaria. They were viewed as half-breeds who followed a new age mish-mash of 5 different religions. Yet, they looked for the Messiah. And as a foretaste of His later instruction to Go and teach, first in Jerusalem, then Samaria, then the world, He comes to Samaria. Yet there is something more going here. Jesus goes to the despised of His nation.

And it was mid-day – noon. Gathering water was a daily chore. It had to be done. Most of the woman of the village came early. This woman was not welcome to come with them. She was, in a certain sense, an outcast. So she came in the heat of the day, when most were inside and resting, to fetch her daily supply of water. There were many reasons she did not fit in among her people.

And Jesus asks of her a drink of water. For a Jew to use the same vessel to drink as a Samaritan was to make them ceremonially unclean. And she is a woman; such a direct request was irregular.

This was not what she expected. Jesus treated her as one who is worthy to enter into a conversation.

If you knew the gift of God... Samaritans only had the ToRaH. They did not have the prophets. She had never heard of the passage from Isaiah that I quoted earlier; she would not have heard about “Living Water”; so she was genuinely puzzled at His words.

She meets Jesus’ respect for her by answering with respect, she calls Him “Lord”. Yet she adheres to custom, observing that He had no separate vessel with which to drink apart from the jug she carried. She can’t yet hear what Jesus is saying to her. She questions, for although she returns His respect, she does not imagine that He is greater than Jacob who gave this well.

Jesus is setting forth for her noetic water – not the physical water that must be renewed constantly.

She is occupied with her own predicament, shunned by the rest of the town, she must trudge to the well in the mid-day heat to get her daily water. She only sees that having water might be easier. “Lord, give me this water that I may thirst no more...” While she is concerned for her physical needs she gives a window into her spiritual needs. She is thirsting not just for water, but for something. She has not found it. She has looked for it in relationships with men. Each time her thirst has not been slaked.

Jesus then shows He is ready to offer the Living Water by asking her to call her husband, as if he might also receive the Living Water.

It may not have been that big a stretch to guess why she had come in the heat of the day to the well – however, Jesus knowledge of

the details took her aback. She had 5 husbands: the Samaritans had the 5 books of the ToRah. The Samaritans had 5 gods with whom they were unfaithful to the God of Israel; she had 5 husbands and yet something she was looking for was not in any of these.

“Lord, I perceive you are a prophet.” Some say she changed the subject. Yet others say that she was looking, that she was thirsty for the truth, and had been looking for that in all the wrong places, that she had a genuine thirst for the living water – a thirst that Jesus was uncovering in her, even as He spoke to her.

So she did not act shocked or indignant that Jesus knew all about her. She perceives that this is not just an ordinary man who confronts her, that makes her thirsty – thirsty for something that her life clearly wasn't giving her. So she starts asking questions – things that had been troubling her, things that she could not make fit. She no longer cares for her physical thirst – now she begins to look towards a deeper thirst. She asks a question that indicates that she is seeking that which is holy: “Where should we worship?” Jacob came to the mountain when he was escaping Esau after he stole his blessing. In her religion's understanding they did not ask what circumstances Jacob came to the mountain. She can only go so far. She wants to know “who is right?”.

We do that often: “Who is right?” We seem to care more for that question and whatever answers we contrive to it . . . rather than “what is for our health and salvation?”

Jesus moves her past the question of “who is right?”

The hour is coming ... In John's Gospel “hour” is mostly pointing towards Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. The hour is coming when both the worship that the Samaritans do and the

worship the Jews do will be set aside for something greater, that time when the Temple would be thrown down – that time when the Kingdom would be inaugurated in our time and history; He tells her of a time beyond time: Worshiping God in spirit and in truth; of a time when the Liturgy of what we celebrate on earth would be what was already celebrated in the heavens.

Then this woman (we don't know her Samaritan name; in baptism her name is Photini), excited by His word, sets forth her expectation of the Messiah. Even without the prophets the Samaritans get this expectation from the words of Moses.

Whereas, Jesus leaves most of those He encountered the question: Is this the Messiah? For this woman He plainly reveals Himself to this woman. He says, "I AM, the one speaking to thee" – not 'I am He' as our English translation suggests. Jesus uses the Name of God to her.

This had to startle her.

But she has little time to indulge being startled. Just then the Disciples return. St. Kyril of Alexandria says of this: The disciples are again astonished at the Saviour's gentleness and they wonder at His meek way. For He did not think it right to shun conversation with the woman in the manner of some who are fierce with intemperate religious scruples, but He unfolds His love for mankind to ALL, by showing that He, being in all respects One Fashioner, does not only impart the life through faith to men, but also to women.

Now she no longer cares about her physical thirst but leaves her waterpot as the disciples had left their nets, and goes to her city to be its evangelist. She does not give her message in declarative statements but rather wants to draw them out the Christ, not her

message. Her question “Is this not the Christ?” was a rhetorical question demanding the response: “YES.” And like the disciples she says “Come and see.” Instinctively she knows how to give the message in a way that will encourage her townsfolk to check Jesus out. She did not want them to trust her report, but to come and see for themselves. She becomes the first apostle to the Church of the gentiles, the first bearer of the Gospel to them.

Photini will, in time, go to North Africa as an apostle to preach the Gospel with her sons and sisters, before being martyred during Nero’s persecution.

What keeps us from leaving aside our worldly cares? our waterpot? And what of the many things in our world that are distracting to us? that take us away from prayer? Our world tells us we must acquire STUFF – stuff that does not satisfy our soul’s yearning for God. And the evidence of how fragile that stuff is shows itself to us in the instability brought upon our own land by those who seek to exploit it for their own greed.

Let us be like the Samaritan woman; let us thirst for Christ, and not be ashamed when He shows us our sin; let us accept the Living Water and healing, and then go and point others to He Who heals us. And so let us become illumination – Photini.

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