

March 15, 2009

Third Sunday of Lent (For use with RCIA)

Reading 1

[Ex 17:3-7](#)

In those days, in their thirst for water,
the people grumbled against Moses,
saying, "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt?
Was it just to have us die here of thirst
with our children and our livestock?"
So Moses cried out to the LORD,
"What shall I do with this people?
a little more and they will stone me!"
The LORD answered Moses,
"Go over there in front of the people,
along with some of the elders of Israel,
holding in your hand, as you go,
the staff with which you struck the river.
I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb.
Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it
for the people to drink."
This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel.
The place was called Massah and Meribah,
because the Israelites quarreled there
and tested the LORD, saying,
"Is the LORD in our midst or not?"

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9](#)

R. (8) **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**
Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.
R. **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**
Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.
R. **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**
Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
Where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works."
R. **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Reading II

[Rom 5:1-2, 5-8](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have gained access by faith
to this grace in which we stand,
and we boast in hope of the glory of God.

And hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
For Christ, while we were still helpless,
died at the appointed time for the ungodly.
Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person,
though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die.
But God proves his love for us
in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Gospel

[Jn 4:5-42 or 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42](#)

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar,
near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.
Jacob's well was there.
Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well.
It was about noon.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water.
Jesus said to her,
"Give me a drink."
His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.
The Samaritan woman said to him,
"How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"
—For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.—
Jesus answered and said to her,
"If you knew the gift of God
and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,'
you would have asked him
and he would have given you living water."
The woman said to him,
"Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep;
where then can you get this living water?
Are you greater than our father Jacob,
who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself
with his children and his flocks?"
Jesus answered and said to her,
"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 him
a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
The woman said to him,
"Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty
or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her,
"Go call your husband and come back."
The woman answered and said to him,
"I do not have a husband."
Jesus answered her,
"You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.'
For you have had five husbands,
and the one you have now is not your husband.
What you have said is true."
The woman said to him,
"Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.
Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain;
but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus said to her,
"Believe me, woman, the hour is coming
when you will worship the Father
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.
You people worship what you do not understand;
we worship what we understand,
because salvation is from the Jews.
But the hour is coming, and is now here,
when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth;
and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.
God is Spirit, and those who worship him
must worship in Spirit and truth."
The woman said to him,
"I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ;
when he comes, he will tell us everything."
Jesus said to her,
"I am he, the one speaking with you."

At that moment his disciples returned,
and were amazed that he was talking with a woman,
but still no one said, "What are you looking for?"
or "Why are you talking with her?"
The woman left her water jar
and went into the town and said to the people,
"Come see a man who told me everything I have done.
Could he possibly be the Christ?"
They went out of the town and came to him.
Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat."
But he said to them,
"I have food to eat of which you do not know."
So the disciples said to one another,
"Could someone have brought him something to eat?"
Jesus said to them,

"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me
and to finish his work.
Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'?
I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest.
The reaper is already receiving payment
and gathering crops for eternal life,
so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together.
For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another reaps.'
I sent you to reap what you have not worked for;
others have done the work,
and you are sharing the fruits of their work."

Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him
because of the word of the woman who testified,
"He told me everything I have done."
When the Samaritans came to him,

they invited him to stay with them;
and he stayed there two days.
Many more began to believe in him because of his word,
and they said to the woman,
"We no longer believe because of your word;
for we have heard for ourselves,
and we know that this is truly the savior of the world."

or

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HOMILY

The poet W. H. Auden tells to us “I know nothing except what everyone knows—if there when Grace dances, I should dance!”

Did you ever notice that the woman at the well is given no name – there are so many names in the Bible, Hannah, Sarah, Miriam, Jonah, Abraham, even Melchizedec so many names in the bible and this woman is not named. But oh yes we know her story she is **that** woman...you know the one who had to go to the well at noon – in the heat of the day –because she...had a past. You know what Church when I hear that somewhere deep down —I just wanna shout out! “Well, Don’t, WE ALL... don’t we all! Have a past – a series of events, decisions, poor choices that are just as much a part of us as our gifts, talents, great stories, or unseen kindnesses.” [pause] Bu each of us is named! [pause] With all our baggage we have our names – we have source a dignity. Look just for a moment at some of the great saints in our Church –people with a past King David (you remember the one who has Bathsheba’s husband killed so that he could take her as his wife), what about St. Augustine of Hippo, there is one with a past! (I don’t think he had all those struggles over just stealing a few pears from his neighbor, and what about Dorothy Day - a woman now on her way to sainthood – known for her past as well.

So what about it Church? What if we enter into this story and offer the woman at the well in today’s gospel a name [pause] what if we name her “GRACE!” And if we enter this story with the eyes and ears of someone from 1st century Palestine, we will notice a few more things. Because this is one of those gospel stories that operates on several levels – you know the kind where it is really helpful to read the footnotes in your bible. So what about some of those details: just two

- It high-noon! “For John this is a pay attention line!” He is saying to the people of his day and to us –“OK – wake up – pay attention. I am gonna shine a spot light on this so you don’t miss it” The spotlight -- nothing short of the sun itself. He is telling us he is saying something really important here.

- What about those – five quote unquote husbands... Five times in that region - the story of Israel was a story of worshiping false gods: Five nations of Babylon, Assyria, and others...that Israel as a people were having an affair with. [slow] It was Israel who was unfaithful – Israel who was sleeping around going around worshiping other gods, not being faithful to Yahweh. It was the nation of Israel and to us that Jesus is speaking. Come back to me – I am the source of life. But isn’t amazing that in a 37verse story about Jesus’ preoccupation is fidelity, he is saying simple “Come back to me ” NOT I know what you did.

This is exactly what the woman at the well – what GRACE does – slowly verse by verse she comes to know who Jesus is: *In verse 9. she says “You are a Jew” In verse 12. she says “Are you greater than Jacob?” In verse 19 she says “I see you are prophet.” In verse 25 she says “ I know the Messiah is coming.”* At the end it is like lights go on, bells ring, flashing neon that says YES!! YOU GOT IT! Grace wins! I am HE!!! I am the one!! Yet how is she remembered –

the one with five husbands and ahem a PAST . We become fixated on 1 line -- of 37 line gospel story and we pick out the sin and miss Grace.

Have you ever felt that someone simply sees your frailty, your brokenness, your sinful past and has missed you – the real you! Same thing here – we miss seeing GRACE the woman at the well because of our preoccupation with her past. We miss the symbol of her transformation, a left behind water jar and focus on her sexual impropriety. We miss that in land where the water jar was your lifeline to the well. Leaving it behind meant a conversion a metanoia—meeting Christ changes all priorities for her and for us. What is Jesus’ concern? He is concerned about being faithful – faithful to the struggle of coming to know him as the Messiah – when we shift away from preoccupation with the past – we see notice the end of the story – JESUS LINGERS. He is there for a couple of days with these *outsiders these Samaritans* –Who say to us boldly “Jesus he is Truly the Savior of the World” – He is my savior...he longs to linger with us.

We miss GRACE for who she really is! Someone just like us coming to gradual understanding of who Jesus really is...line by line verse by verse, the woman comes to know who Jesus is. not so different from us, week by week, struggle by struggle coming to know to really know who Jesus is...that is what Jesus is preoccupied with that we are faithful to the struggle of coming to know HIM!! More and more, I see the encounter of today’s gospel as an invitation. An encounter with Grace as a profound invitation., a moments of seeing things as if for the first time, a confirming feeling that says deeply -- where we say our own names ahh this is good, this is real, this is Grace. The truth is, grace doesn’t come to pat us on the head or bring us success—it isn’t magic or reward, and it is almost never what we expect it to be! Most often, it comes as the presence of God appearing perhaps as in the story a slow coming to awareness of God who is already right there before us. !” **Grace is that partner who pulls us onto the dance floor, even when we don’t know the music, even when we’re not sure how to dance.** Grace comes to us in the locked rooms of our fear and confusion; in the midst of our naïveté, or self-doubt. She comes as a strong wind that takes us to uncharted waters—when we foolishly think that we know exactly what we are doing and where we are going! It comes, most often, for me as the answer to my most authentic prayers—like “help me – please” or a late night “thank you for today

In our preoccupation with Grace and her past – we miss two things: that we too -- ALL of us have a past - all have a past, and that it is not what Jesus is concerned about. Jesus’ wants us to come to know him as Messiah through faithfulness. In this case faithfully coming to the source of our life giving water: maybe in a relationship, maybe in prayer, maybe in the joys of conversion, maybe here at the table – (pause) to go there and drink deeply of what is being offered. **I know nothing except what everyone knows—if there when Grace dances, I should dance! AMEN!**

Joseph Carver, S.J.