Encounter With Jesus — Samaritan Woman

 Lent 3 John 4

Although I did not intend to create a sermon series for this Lent, I think that,

looking at the series of lessons from John's gospel this year, one is certainly

created. And it could be called "Encounters with Jesus — How Life Changes!" In

week 1, Jesus has an encounter with Satan, and by his strong reliance on his

relationship with his heavenly Father, and a strong reliance on God's Word,

he refuses the temptations, and the devil realizes that this may be a superior being

he is trying to tempt. In week 2, Jesus has an encounter with Nicodemus, a member

of the Sanhedrin and a Pharisee. In their sharing together, Jesus is able to help Nico

see the limitations of his Pharisaic beliefs, and open him to the possibilities of the

Holy Spirit and being born from above. And eventually, to the offer of salvation

and new life, Nicodemus says yes, and believes in Jesus. In week 3, today, Jesus

has an encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well. (I will say more on this).

Hopefully we will be at worship for week 4 as Jesus has an encounter with a man

born blind. For week 5 Jesus has a most memorable encounter with Lazarus, and

week 6 he has an encounter with Jerusalem as he enters the city on Palm Sunday.

Hopefully we will get to learn about these together over the next few weeks.

But back to today. Jesus is traveling back to Galilee, because even this early

in John's gospel, things are heating up between Jesus and the Pharisees. So he

heads back home. Now there are 2 routes back to Nazareth from Jerusalem, one

kind of out of the way, and the direct route that takes him through Samaria. Now

most good Jews avoided Samaria, because they considered the Samaritans to be

second-class Jews. After the Assyrians conquered Samaria, they imported

foreigners to intermarry with the people who were left, and they introduced

worship practices foreign to Israel's worship, including building a temple on

Mount Gerizim. So the "good" Jews considered Samaritans to be beneath them,

and the idea of a good Samaritan was inconceivable.

But coming off of his meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus goes home through

Samaria. Was there a reason for him to choose this path home? Absolutely — with

Jesus, there is always purpose behind his actions. He is going to invite people into

the kingdom — one person, one group, one village at a time if necessary.

So he and the disciples end up in Sychar, in Samaria, the site of Jacob's

well. The disciples have gone into the town to get food, so Jesus is thirsty and sits down at the well. A Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water, and the

encounter begins. "Will you give me a drink?" What a Jewish rabbi is asking a

Samaritan woman for a drink. A Samaritan — and a woman. Inconceivable! And

that is pretty much how she replies.

Which leads Jesus into a conversation with her, not about the water in the

well, but the presence of living water available here and now to her. She is thinking

literally (How are you going to draw this living water?) but in the course of the

conversation, realizes that Jesus is offering her something more, something far

greater than she hopes or realizes. He is indeed greater than Jacob, as he is about to

reveal to her. He wants to offer her the living water of relationship with the Father

through him, which is a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

And how does she respond: " Give me some of that, please"

Which leads to more conversation: "Go call your husband and come back".

To which she responds she has no husband. She speaks truth. And Jesus, in reply,

speaks truth. Not judgment, but truth. "You have had 5 husbands, and the one you are with is not your husband." Truth.

And she responds to this truth with more conversation: Well, since we're

talking together, and you seem to know more than I realize, let's talk religion,

because I sense you are a prophet. We worship here on Mt. Gerizim, and you Jews

say the only place to worship is Jerusalem. Which is ok? And Jesus responds that

the time is coming, in fact is present now, when God does a new thing, and neither

temple will matter, because what matter is not where you worship, but who you

worship in spirit and truth.

And she recognized the truth in what he is offering. "I suppose when

Messiah comes this will be true." "I who speak to you am he!"

Wow — not only is this guy speaking to her and asking for water, but he is

offering her living water, and knows all about her, and now claims to be Messiah!

How cool is that???

So how does this encounter change her? She goes to the town and tells

everyone — get that, everyone . . . "Come and see this man who knows all about me.

Could he be the Christ?" And many came to see him, and believed because of her

testimony. So he stayed for 2 days, and many more became believers. And how does this encounter change them? "We no longer believe just because of what you

said; now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the

Savior of the world." Conversion . . . from Samaritans . . . how cool is that?

Do you remember the original conclusion of John's gospel? "Jesus did many

other miraculous things in the presence of his disciples that are not recorded in this

book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son

of God, and that believing, you may have life in his name."

An encounter with Jesus that leads to new life, and it is so welling up inside

that it has to be shared. That is the encounter with the Samaritan woman, and her

village, and it is our encounter with Jesus as well.

In our time spent with Jesus throughout our lives, we have been able to drink

of this living water, esp. at times in our lives when we were soooo thirsty for it.

And right now, in this trying, scary, chaotic and uncertain time, we can draw

deeply from that well of living water.

This water from Jesus gives us calm in the midst of the chaos, because it

reminds us that God in Jesus has a plan, and he is in control, and he works for our good. It reminds us that he is trustworthy, and if he has promised to give us peace,

courage, perseverance, character and hope, he will give them through the Holy

Spirit. And if this is happening for us and to us, it will overflow through us to

those around us. If we are calm in Christ, we can radiate that to those around us. If

we are hopeful in Christ, we can share that hope with those around us. If we are

grace-filled in Christ, we can pass that on to those around us. Rather than being

contagious and infected with the coronavirus, let us be contagious and infected

with the presence of Christ! Let us be those who are optimistic, trusting, holding

fast to the promises of Jesus, and let us be those who are sharing his calm, his

peace, his hope, his grace with those around us who are simply feeling confused,

anxious, and scared.

Like the Samaritan woman, let us tell others about this Jesus, who makes

everything different, and whose life-changing living water changes everything.

Amen