

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

8th March 2026

John 4:5-42 See text at end of document.

For the next three Sunday the readings from Matthew are set aside and very important and profound texts from John are put before us. It is in this way that we are introduced to John's gospel which does not have a year to itself in the liturgical cycle. Over the next three weeks each reading from John will consider ways in which we may come to a vibrant Easter faith in Jesus, the Samaritan woman, one that satisfies our deepest thirst; the Man Born Blind, one that opens our eyes to really see; the Raising of Lazarus, one who brings us to the fullness of life.

This week the story shows how the woman from Samaria comes gradually to an understanding of who Jesus is and how this in turn transforms her life as she commits herself to him in faith and, in the process, becomes the first missionary in the gospel of John. In the gospel these discourses are not meant to be read as normal conversations but as opportunities to explore who Jesus is and to respond to him. Hence the story relies heavily on symbolism. The important metaphors here are thirst and water. Thirst is expressive of our need for God and water points to the gift of the Holy Spirit that quenches our thirst fully. The encounter with Jesus shows how faith may flourish in the most unpromising of circumstances. As a woman of Samaria it might be reasonably be expected that a Jewish teacher would have nothing to do with her. But that is not the way of God, and Jesus reveals that he is driven by a deep desire to do the work his Father gave him, namely to bring everyone to an awareness of their dignity as children of God.

SEAN GOAN – Let the Reader Understand

This story is a symbolic narrative, typical of John's Gospel. There may be a remote historical basis, but as it stands it is not historical. Typically for this Gospel (i) there is a one-to-one encounter; (ii) the person encountered makes a considerable journey of faith (Jew, greater than Jacob, prophet, Christ, Saviour of the world); (iii) the exchanges have two layers of meaning (living water = running water). Intriguingly, this woman becomes a herald.

John 4 has many levels of meaning. Perhaps three hints may help. It is a story of *pre-evangelisation*, that is the awakening of an unrecognised spiritual thirst. It tells of the *pilgrimage* of faith in Christ, in ever-deepening stages (from being "a" Jew to the saviour of the world). It illustrates *mission*, as the woman drops her bucket and the real success of mission when the people believe *on their own account*.

Thought for the day : Today we are greatly helped by the wonderful Gospel of the Woman at the Well. On the third attempt, Jesus finally gets through to her but after that there is no stopping her. As Augustine teaches, she represents us: what do I thirst for? What is the most important thing in my life? Where do I now find God? By relentless challenge and resolute honesty, we too can be led to that encounter with Jesus, which changes everything, "giving life a new horizon and a decisive direction." May we come to believe because we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.

Kieran O'Mahony OSA – www.tarsus.ie

The story is in two sections:

- Verses 2 and 3 : At first the woman is content with the water she draws from the well. Jesus very gradually leads her to search for another kind of water which has two characteristics: when you drink it you do not get thirsty again, as it comes from a spring inside of you. Enter into the metaphor so that you can recognize the spiritual journey it evokes for you. When have you experienced Jesus guiding others in this way?

- Verses 15 to 24, and 29 : Here the journey is the woman coming to trust Jesus as Messiah because he leads her to self-knowledge: "He told me everything I ever did." Recognize spiritual growth as that kind of journey, with Jesus as guide.

Situate the story in the context of Lent, thinking of all those who will experience conversion and growth at this season, those who will be received into the Church community on Holy Saturday night, or who will take part in Lenten missions.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL – LECTIO DIVINA

Pointers for prayer

1. Jesus leads the woman along a wonderful journey towards a deeper, fuller human life. You can enter the story from the perspective of the woman. Recognize her resistance to growth, her complacency, her evasions, and her eventual acceptance, partial though it was, of Jesus. When have you, or others, made a similar journey in your relationship with God? with others? with your own self?
2. The woman is attracted by what Jesus is saying, but from very human motives: the thought of having water in such a way that she did not have to come and draw it from the well. We too are attracted to Jesus by very mixed motives, some of them matters of personal interest - belonging, community, security, What have been the human motives that have attracted you to faith, prayer, religion, church and that have been stepping stones to a deeper personal relationship with Jesus. Perhaps we can also see the same movement in the growth of some of our human relationships.
3. You can also enter the story with Jesus, the ideal leader, parent, teacher, or spiritual guide. Notice how he meets the woman where she is, needing her assistance, how he is patient with her, but also challenges her to grow to what she is capable of.

JOHN BYRNE OSA —Intercom

Quite spontaneously Jesus begins a conversation with the woman: Will you give me something to drink? He presents himself as someone in need. He needs a drink and seeks help and a welcome from the heart of that woman. There is a language that we all understand because we all know what it is to feel tired or lonely, to thirst for happiness, to feel fear or sadness or to be seriously ill. Our basic needs unite us and bring us to help each other, setting aside our differences. The woman is surprised that Jesus does not speak to her with the air of superiority proper to Jews in front of Samaritans, or with the arrogance of men towards women.

A new relationship springs up between Jesus and the woman. It is more human and it rings true. Jesus tells her of his deep desire: "if you knew the gift of God", if you knew that God is a gift, that he offers himself to all as love that saves. But the woman has not known unconditional love. Water has to be drawn from the well with hard labour.

When the woman hears Jesus speak of water that quenches thirst for ever, of an inner spring that wells up to life-giving fruitfulness and eternal life, a desire is awakened in her for the fullness of life, a desire that is in all of us. "Sir, give me this water." We can speak with anyone about God if we see ourselves as in need, if we share our thirst for happiness and overcome our differences, if prophets and religious leaders ask women for a drink, if we all together discover that God is love and only love.

José A. Pagola - Following in the Footsteps of Jesus - Year A

This encounter breaks religious and social taboos, but Jesus casually engages the woman in conversation as if it's the most natural thing in the world. He recognizes her as an individual with a life story and a context of her own. There is intimacy in this encounter. She is deeply affected by his openness and teaching and becomes a crucial witness.

What is beautiful about this today's gospel is the way Jesus goes about winning hearts; meeting the woman where she is, transcending boundaries, listening and allowing space for questions and debate. It's a more gentle model for Lent that we might be used to.

Set aside some time this week to re-read this passage. Try to place yourself in the shoes of the woman as she talks with Jesus. Trace the stages she goes through, from surprise to belief to excitement. Can you identify with these stages in your own faith journey?

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—Go Deeper

Gospel John 4:5-42

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman 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, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?' – Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied:

'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.'

'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?' Jesus replied:

'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again;

but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again:

the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.'

'Sir,' said the woman 'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.' 'Go and call your husband' said Jesus to her 'and come back here.' The woman answered, 'I have no husband.' He said to her, 'You are right to say, "I have no husband"; for although you have had five, the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke the truth there.' 'I see you are a prophet, sir' said the woman. 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' Jesus said:

'Believe me, woman, 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 do know: for salvation comes from the Jews.

But the hour will come – in fact it is here already – when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants.

God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.'

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah – that is, Christ – is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.' 'I who am speaking to you,' said Jesus 'I am he.'

At this point his disciples returned, and were surprised to find him speaking to a woman, though none of them asked, 'What do you want from her?' or, 'Why are you talking to her?' The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people. 'Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did; I wonder if he is the Christ?' This brought people out of the town and they started walking towards him.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, do have something to eat; but he said, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples asked one another, 'Has someone been bringing him food?' But Jesus said:

'My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work.'

Have you not got a saying: Four months and then the harvest?

Well, I tell you: Look around you, look at the fields; already they are white, ready for harvest!

Already the reaper is being paid his wages, already he is bringing in the grain for eternal life, and thus sower and reaper rejoice together.

For here the proverb holds good: one sows, another reaps; I sent you to reap a harvest you had not worked for.

Others worked for it; and you have come into the rewards of their trouble.'

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the strength of the woman's testimony when she said, 'He told me all I have ever done', so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.'