

Scripture Reading

John 4:5-42

**Leave Your Jar**

As each year passes, our lives get filled up with joys and concerns. For many our hearts tend to harden from the wear and tear of life. Things happen that hurt us and make us more cautious. The further along we go the more we back away or fight back. Most of us throughout the years have started to build up walls of protection and although we may think this makes us stronger; most of us if we are honest and take some time to be self aware we will know that all of these actions leave us thirsting for something more in life.

This is the kind of thirsting Jesus is talking to us about today. This Samaritan woman story is a story of transformation, release and freedom, not from sin but from exhaustion and hurt.

Throughout the generations this woman has gotten a bit of a bad rap. With so many marriages people begin to be critical without us even knowing her story. As soon as I read this weeks scripture I could hear Peter Short saying “Never look down on a struggle for life.” What if this woman was a widow, or she had fled abuse, or her husband left her for a younger brand...what if? Imagine the hurt and despair any one of those situations would put her in.

I have heard this woman called a prostitute, an outcast and a myriad of other judgements and yet when I read this story again this week I noticed that Jesus claims or states none of those. And “Jesus at no point invites repentance or, for that matter, speaks of sin at all...Further, she could now be living with someone that she was dependent on, or be in what’s called a Levirate marriage (where a childless woman is married to her deceased husband’s brother in order to produce an heir yet is not always technically considered the brother’s wife). There are any number of ways, in fact, that one might imagine this woman’s story as tragic rather than scandalous.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps if we see this woman more like one of us we might actually hear the point of the story, rather than get distracted by her immorality and sin. Jesus longs for this woman’s life to be filled with peace and love rather than filled with dwelling on the hurts and burdens of the past and present. This woman then takes notice of Jesus. She see’s who he is because of the way he notices and attends to her. She say’s to him “I see that you are a prophet.”

“Seeing,” in John, is an important theological activity. “To see” is often connected with belief. When the woman says, “I see you are a prophet,” she is ... making a confession of faith... because “Jesus has “seen” her. He has seen her plight of dependence, not immorality. He has

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<sup>1</sup> Lose, David “Leaving It All Behind” [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)

recognized her, spoken with her, offered her something of incomparable worth. He has *seen* her -- she *exists* for him, has worth, value, significance, and all of this is treatment to which she is unaccustomed.”<sup>2</sup> And then she feels safe enough to ask Jesus a question of worship and religion that divides people - I can only guess that in this question she longs to hear a response of hope, a response of coming together. And she receives such an answer. She is filled with such hope and promise that she leaves her water jar behind and runs to tell everyone about this prophet and potential messiah she has just met.

And this is where we witness her transformation. This woman who really has everything stacked against her being a Samaritan meeting with a Jew, a single woman in a male world, who has faced a challenging, likely tragic life and is therefore dependent on others who likely shame and judge her. This woman encounters Jesus and suddenly she has the courage and hope to tell the world a new way of life is here.

God quenches her thirst and provides her with living water. I wonder what things hold us back from living in hope for the future? I wonder what things cause us to resist eternal life here and now.

Perhaps running and leaving her jar behind is a symbol of leaving behind the burdens, chores and responsibilities that constrain her, the things that keep her from a life filled with the abundance God desires for her. If that is the case then I wonder for us what jars we would like to leave behind, trading our past tragedies and present challenges for the living water Jesus offers?

Perhaps its a label we live with that keeps us from courageous living. Perhaps it's a past wound or fear, or an unhealthy relationship, or a grief, sadness or guilt.

It could be a number of things we are thirsting for. It could be a longing for transformation and new life. Take time to consider and pray into those things with me.

Holy One, “you want for us only good things and yet we often have a hard time accepting your gifts and being the people you have called us to be. Help us let go of those things that hold us back, remind us of your unfailing love, and create in us the hope and courage to drink the living water you offer and live into the future you have created. Amen.”

Naming our challenges and praying about them won't change everything of course. But it will give us a chance to invite God more deeply into our lives, to practice connecting our faith in Jesus to the realities of our lives in the world.

“This woman has so many things stacked against her. And yet she leaves them behind and shares the story of what God did in her life. She does so, we should note, at first rather tentatively. The grammatical construction of the question she poses to her neighbors -- “He can't be the Messiah, can he?” -- actually anticipates a negative answer. And yet those first tentative, perhaps even anxious, steps take her away from her past and into a future she could not have imagined.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> IBID

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If we are open to what is happening all around us Jesus is present. God provides us with what we need in places we would least expect God to provide it. May you leave your water jar behind and pick up new life today.

Amen.