

Give Me A Drink

I need to begin with a short history lesson, so that you can have a better understanding of the context of today's scripture reading.

[Israel & Judah Map]

After the death of King Solomon the Kingdom of Israel was split in two. So you had Israel in the North and Judah in the South.

[Assyrian Conquest]

In 723 BC, the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, whose capital was Samaria. The fall of Samaria was a very traumatic experience for the Israelites because the Assyrians were known for their savage treatment of rebels. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were lost during this period.

[Captors]

The Assyrians took away many of the surviving Israelites, and in their place imported pagan people from throughout the region to live in Israel. These newcomers brought with them their worship of pagan deities, yet they also attempted to worship the "god of the land" (Yahweh). Their blending of religions were the forerunners of the religious/ethnic group later known as the Samaritans.

[MAP OF SAMARIA]

To outsiders, Samaritans and Jewish beliefs were quite similar, but Samaritans and Jews argued over the differences.

For the Jews, Samaritans were like half-breeds because in Deuteronomy 7:3-4 it says, “Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods.”

[MAP OF SAMARIA BYPASS]

Often, Jews traveling between Judah in the south and Galilee in the north would avoid going through Samaria by crossing the Jordan River to the east.

[MAP OF SAMARIA to Sychar]

But in today's scripture Jesus says he had to go through Samaria.... Now, obviously, Jesus doesn't **have** to go **through** Samaria, but he has a very important point to make. As Warren Carter reminds us the necessity is not geographical; it's theological. “The necessity reveals God's inclusive love for all.” The division between Samaritans and Jews became a difference based in blood and identity. The two peoples were religious about this ethnic divide and faithful to the hate that generated from it.

[Jesus at Well]

Jesus enters the Samaritan town of Sychar. He's hot and tired from his long walk. It is noon – the sun is high, shade is scarce. His mouth is dry and he has no way of drawing water from the town's well.

[Women at well]

In those days, the town well was a meeting place - a place where women would go in the morning, to get their water and catch up with their friends.

[Woman arriving at well]

When the woman arrives at the well, Jesus is glad to see her – even though for some reason she chose to come to the well during the hottest time of day when no one else should have been there.

It is at this point that some... remarkable things happen.

[Jesus]

One of the remarkable things is that they talk to one another – a Jewish Rabbi and a Samaritan woman.

Jesus begins with a demand really, “Give me a drink.”

[**Woman**] This probably shocked the woman because a respectable man does not talk to women they don't know as family or a close friend. And if he *did* know her, he would know that she was no respectable woman – even her own people looked down upon her. She's been divorced several times and she isn't even married to her current partner.

[**Water being poured**] In Christian Century magazine, Patricia Farris points out another remarkable thing happening here. We have two people with some basic needs: Jesus needs a drink of cool water to live.

The woman needs a drink of living water of grace and truth only Jesus can provide - a living water of healing and wholeness and a new way of life. It is through their mutual needs that the two find a mutual humanity. The seeming distance between them dissolved into a relationship.

[**Jesus**] As they continue to converse, Jesus recognizes her thirst for forgiveness and acceptance. Often in John's Gospel, Jesus uses words with ambiguity which others in the gospel take literally. Earlier in the Gospel of John we learned how the Pharisee Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night – hidden from view of his fellow Pharisees – and although he was a learned man, he misunderstands Jesus' meaning of being born again and his lack of understanding frustrated Jesus.

[Woman] Today, when Jesus refers to “living water” the woman misunderstands him. So, Jesus takes a step back and changes the conversation in a way so that it reveals to her who he is.

“I know that Messiah is coming,” she says,...

[Jesus MCU]

and he says, “I am he.” This is the first time that he said that to anyone. Another remarkable thing – where both of them stood for one bright moment in time, while all the rules, taboos and history that separate them fall forgotten to the ground.

Barbara Taylor Brown points out the importance of the Messiah. You see, the Messiah is the one in whose presence you know who you really are – the good and bad of it, the all of it, the hope in it. The Messiah is the one who shows you who you are by showing you who he is – who crosses all boundaries, breaks all rules, drops all disguises – speaking to you like someone you have known all your life, so that you can go back to face people you thought you could never face again, speaking to them as boldly as he spoke to you.

[Woman MCU]

Unlike Nicodemus – this unnamed, Samaritan woman immediately understood the importance of Jesus – the Messiah. She went back to her village where she had been scorned and laughed at and said, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done.”

[Crowd of people]

And they went to see him. After a short time of talking with him, another remarkable thing happens – the Samaritans ask this Jewish man and his disciples to **stay** with them; and they did for two-days.

Imagine how Norteños and Sureños putting away their differences and fellowshipping together would change a community. Imagine how Republicans and Democrats putting away *their* differences and fellowshipping together would change our nation!

Friends, remarkable things can happen when we put aside our prejudices and look at our adversaries as being created in the image of God.

[Woman] To this day, this Samaritan woman is honored in many cultures. The Orthodox know her as St. Photini, or Svetlana in Russian.

Her name means “equal to the apostles.”

This was no foolish woman. She took Jesus' offer of living to her full potential, whole-heartedly and with his help she and her people were able to open their minds to new possibilities.

Have we lived that way? If not, I certainly hope we begin to.

Amen.

Benediction

Know that God has formed you for himself,
so that you might declare his praise.

In every time and place, give thanks to the Lord,
trust in his grace and serve him with energy,
imagination, intelligence and love.