

The Carrier

John 4.5-42

February 11, 2024

So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; ⁶ and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. ⁹ Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." ¹¹ She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? ¹² "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" ¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." ¹⁶ He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." ¹⁹ The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

²⁷ At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?" ³⁰ They went out of the city, and were coming to Him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But He said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples were saying to one another, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. ³⁵ "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. ³⁶ "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. ³⁷ "For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

*³⁹ From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I have done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹ Many more believed because of His word; ⁴² and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed **the Savior of the world.**"*

We're looking at the speeches, the longer conversations and discourses of Jesus Christ in *The Fourth Gospel*. We've looked at the long dialogue with the influential Jewish congressman, Nicodemus. And today we hope to finish this exchange between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at the scene of what is, in the Bible, a very important hotspot or hub for life – i.e., a well (see Gen. 21, 29 et al).

Using the symbols of hunger and thirst, of living/flowing water and His own unknown food, Jesus Christ addresses the whole idea of FULFILLMENT. Are we fulfilled in our daily life? Is our work productive, gratifying and valuable? Do YOU have a sense that you are HELPFUL to others ...do people find you to be an enriching/refreshing person? Do you ever feel like you're on a kind of merry-go-round – everyday living the monotonous life – “*same-as-it-ever-was, same-as-it-ever-was*” (David Byrne) People talk about “living your best life now” but are you just tired?

It's really a great opportunity to delve into our lives a bit and maybe even to ask the people around us, “Am I a life-promoting, encouraging, engaging person to those around me? And are the people with whom I live and work encouraged and replenished by being with me... or am I sort of exhausted and exhausting...?”

This passage is about weariness and the tiresome routine of daily life AND the hope of getting replenished and remotivated. It introduces a way of life characterized by being invigorated and also being invigorating to other people, becoming a bracing stream of inSPIRation to the people around you.

Let's look at this conversation:

#1 The MOMENT and the MOTIF

#2 The DIRECTION and DEVELOPMENT

#3 The EFFECTS and FALLOUT

Writers like Os Guinness (Oxford-educated thinker/writer) he and many others are exploring the link between what he calls, “*Fast Life*” and mental illness and exhaustion in our modern society. In a book called *Carpe Diem Redeemed*, he says it sort of began with the advent of clocks...and the wrist-watch; what one poet called “the sinister god” (Charles Baudelaire; “The Clock”). A much-anticipated book due out in March: Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation : How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*.

In an article called, “Accelerating Past Happiness: We know what makes us happy but can we slow down enough to get it?” the writer notes, “My grandparents... grew up without electricity in rural Virginia and slept on hay-filled sleep sacks with 9 or 10 siblings. Today, just shy of 90 years old, their smart tablet gives them access to the totality of human knowledge, most of the music that's ever been written or recorded, and the ability to video chat with their family across three or four different states.” That's a lot of rapid change!

Our modern world seems to be spinning faster. We're burdened with more information than we can process... and that kind of RAPID change can (and I think HAS) left a lot of people struggling to keep up and just psychologically tired. The tyranny of the urgent has become exponentially MORE tyrannical. I'm not surprised that YOU may feel exhausted.

We talk about “*infectious laughter*” – but sometimes there's also a kind of infectious weariness radiating from people. We might feel, “Uh, oh! Here comes ‘*the cooler*’... This conversation is going to be draining from the snarky remarks... and little grievances and criticisms ... this wearied person often leaves me feeling weary, down and exhausted.” Infectious Laughter and Infectious Lethargy.

This story (John 4) begins on a note of fatigue: *“Jesus, being wearied from His journey.”* Being fully human as well as fully divine, He sits at noon by a well. Wells are often important in the Bible. In Genesis, wells are often where deals are struck and where men meet their future wives.

They are in Samaria – hostile region – Samaritans and Jews are enemies...a long history of hatred; they avoid each other at any cost! The disciples go into town to buy FOOD and up comes this Samaritan woman. She doesn't come when other women come...maybe because she avoids other women and maybe other women avoid her.

Jesus Christ is tired and thirsty. BUT if He wants to drink, He has to depend on... the enemy. He has to humble Himself and ask a favor. It's like being in a feud with your neighbor and having to borrow a tool. Awkward.

She feels the discomfort. She asks, *“What's up with that? You can't ask me for a drink?”* (v.9) AND she's a “she”. Social rules forbade that kind of interaction.

But (as we saw) Jesus Christ ignores the social obstacles and says, *“If you knew the gift of God and who was asking you, ‘give Me a drink’, you would be asking Me... and I would give you flowing water...living water.”*

So, that's the setup, the MOMENT/opportunity and the MOTIF/theme of this interchange – weariness from a journey...a search for food (as the disciples go shopping) ... a woman, a Samaritan woman, probably an ostracized woman (*The Other*) AND a single Jewish Man who will certainly know better than to converse with HER!

BUT food and water and weariness become a bridge to something deeper, portals from the known to the unknown, the universal, mundane human needs for rest and water and food – these become the first steps in a DIRECTION and DEVELOPMENT from shallow to deep ...known to unknown, physical to spiritual. It reminds me of *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* from “Psychology 101”. The base of the triangle is “Physiological Needs” – daily necessities like air, food/drink, shelter, sleep, Superbowl (OK – not that last one).

Maslow's next level up is *Safety*. Then *Belonging and Love*. The next motivational level (ascending the triangle) is the *Esteem*, respect and acceptance from others. And finally, at the top is Self-actualization (i.e., realizing one's potential). Maslow later added *Transcendence* as the top i.e., an idea of ultimate purpose and the reason for one's life. And Jesus Christ has a similar hierarchy in mind as He moves the woman up from physical to spiritual.

“I can give water”, says Jesus, “that not only quenches at a deeper level BUT turns the drinker into a source of satisfaction and refreshment for others” – v.14 *“the water I give will become a well of water springing up to eternal life”*.

The woman says, *“Give ME this water so I won't get thirsty nor have to come all this way to draw!”* She's raising the issue of tedium – the wearisome routines of life.

Then Jesus says, *“Go get your husband and come back!”* and she says, *“I don't have a husband.”*

And Jesus says, *“I know...You've had five husbands and the man you live with now, is NOT your husband.”* This may be why she comes when no other women are there: she's a “case” ... Maybe women don't want to be around her...don't trust her! Maybe she's just tired of the whispering and the dirty looks.

And NOW (v.19), she makes a discovery, *“I perceive (big word for John!) that You are a prophet!”* She asks Him a doctrinal question about the proper location for worship.

And Jesus Christ answers her...always taking the dialogue deeper and deeper, *“Look, I’m sure this is an interesting question for you (where to worship) and you could impress your friends if you had the answer... But there ARE bigger, deeper questions you should be asking. This is a moment of destiny... (at the Well!) the hour has come; the invitation is going out! How about your own heart? Are YOU a true worshiper? Is God’s Spirit in you, stirring you to worship? Do YOU know the true God?”*

“Well...I...uh...I know a few things...” (something BIG is dawning on her!). *“I know that the Messiah is coming and He’ll reveal all things to us”*... Then Jesus Christ states it, what she’s starting to perceive, *“I AM,”* says Jesus!

Just then the disciples arrive; they’re amazed...that He’d be talking to a Samaritan woman (they don’t even know her history) but they’re silent. And the woman splits! She leaves her water pot right there... a need deeper than physical thirst is being met. It’s already gushing out of her, just like Jesus said it would. And she runs for town to tell people.

And WHAT does she tell them? What’s convinced her that THIS is indeed the Messiah? *“Come, see a man who really KNOWS me...He told me all the things that I’ve done ...He revealed to me that all the men in the world...3 marriages, 4 marriages, 5, 6...500... no man can really satisfy the deepest thirst in my life!”* She tells the whole village, *“Great news! I just met a man who knows all about my moral failings and still humbled Himself to speak with me... like I was important and not yucky.”*

In other words, she exposes her flaws to everyone. She’s humble because she just met the Humble Messiah, Humility Himself, who knew all about her and loved her any way! It allows her to be totally open about all her past!

And when the townspeople see this side of the woman ...where she may have been easily dismissed up to this point...NOW they take her very seriously! This is something NEW...this is really surprising, unexpected and... exhilarating!

The whole town comes to the Well, *“Who is this Humble Messiah ...who knows all about us and loves us anyway?”* Meanwhile, the disciples say, *“Teacher, eat!”* and Jesus says, *“I just ate... I have food you don’t know about.”*

“Where is it, Lord?” (Sounds like Nicodemus! *“How can I go again into my mother’s womb?”*) *“Where is the food You’ve been hiding from us, Lord?”* (They’re still at the base of Maslow’s pyramid!)

“My food”, says Jesus Christ, *“is to do the will of Him who sent Me and accomplish His work.”*

Jesus Christ is saying, *“You guys really don’t KNOW about this kind of food...because you really don’t know about the kind of relationship I have with My FatherYOU relate to God out of fear and obligation... I do His will because it’s My great delight; it nourishes Me. It sustains, invigorates and refreshes Me...For Me to do the will of Him who sent me is as natural for Me as EATING is for you!”*

Later Jesus Christ will pray at the Last Supper, *“Father, I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You’ve given Me to do (John 17.4).”* He obeyed like no other human being ever obeyed. He was hungry to obey...not because He had to or out of fear. He obeys not like a slave but like a son. His obligations and His joys were the same.

We obey God like riding a horse but relying on the whip and the bridle and bit as the horse struggles to go his own way but is forced to comply (Psalm 32.9) ... For Jesus to do His Father’s will is like riding with no saddle, no bridle or spurs or bit...and the horse and rider are like ONE. Picture a child riding bareback with the child’s hands raised above his head, laughing. This is how Jesus loves God and loves people.

Even when His obligations required an infinite terror, even when He was called to become loathsome in the sight of the Father, even when HE would made the symbol of everything that’s wrong with ME ... when my sin was charged to Him... Facing Hell, He prayed, *“Not My will but Thine be done.”*

Even when obedience required Him to be exhausted and to say from the cross, *“I thirst”*, He’s wrung-out and dried-up so I could be revitalized, refreshed and sustained.

As a believer in Jesus, His obedience is credited to ME, a perfect, flawlessly motivated obedience. The mission He came to fulfill was to live a flawless life of love so that my nakedness and shame, my past could be covered – just like that woman at the well.

Because of that spotless life of joyful obedience, the Father sees me (and everyone who believes) as if WE were THAT obedient. My shame and guilt were put on Jesus Christ and His beauty is attributed to me! That IS the Good News of the Gospel. God’s Spirit resides in me and fills me to overflowing as I repent and believe (Gal. 3.1-5; Luke 11.13).

The results of this whole encounter between a woman in shame and the one Man who obeyed for her and who loved her to death... the fallout is harvest. The living water sprung up in her soul and a whole town is refreshed and brought to life. Jesus Christ says, *“Look! Here comes the fields ripe for harvest”* and they look up and see the whole town coming to drink the Living Water.

“From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all the things that I have done ... and they were saying to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we’ve heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.”

She is a symbol of the Church. He is Her Groom. The Samaritans are the world – HE is Savior of the WORLD!

How did this woman, tired, thirsty, world-weary, victimized... and unsatisfied ...how did she become NOT ONLY refreshed but also refreshING...so refreshing that she brought a whole town to life? Well, what she got...was simply an encounter with Jesus Christ. “If you only knew the gift of God and who you were talking to”, said Jesus. And that’s what He gave her. He brought her to see: “I perceive.” She...perceives Him to be a prophet and then sees Him as the Messiah... and Savior of the World.

He humbled Himself and put Himself at her mercy, as it were, asks her for help. Then later, He calls her to follow suit, as if to say, “Now, your turn...I humbled Myself...now you try ...Let’s talk about your life.” And she doesn’t lash out with, “How dare you!” She feels like He can be trusted and that He has and He IS the Gift of God for her.

His display of humility refreshes/invigorates her to get open and honest. She repents and believes and, in that way, she's both refreshed and becomes a Carrier of LIFE for others, *"a well of water springing up to eternal life."*

In the end, her obedience actually looks like Jesus Christ's obedience ...It becomes like food for her... In fact, it becomes more important than water! She left her bucket and runs to tell people. He knew about *"what she had done"* (v. 39) – THAT'S what moved the town. It took courage to say that, and she found that refreshing courage in Jesus Christ.

There's much more here: Jesus Christ, as a real Man, knew the limits of His human nature and rested... got weary... sat down. There's something for us to learn there – we think our multi-tasking and burning the candle at both ends is so necessary because we're so important...it's a delusion. Rest and Sabbath are gifts from God!

But in the end...it all comes down to this: *"if only you knew the gift of God and who it is who speaks to you"...* We can become self-forgetful Carriers of grace to others only to the degree that we know the One who obeyed perfectly, who died sacrificially, who rose victoriously and who pours His Spirit into our tired, discouraged and often discouragING hearts.

To the extent we come to repent and know Him ...to THAT extent our obedience will become like His ...our obligations will become our passion and our delight. Our obedience will become as natural and as sustaining as eating. **(Let's Pray)**

And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. (Rev. 21.5-6)