

## *Living Water*

John 4.5-26

February 4, 2024

*So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph;<sup>6</sup> 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.*

*<sup>7</sup> There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."<sup>8</sup> For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. <sup>9</sup> 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.) <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? <sup>12</sup> "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?" <sup>13</sup> Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; <sup>14</sup> 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."*

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

We're looking at the words spoken by Jesus Christ in The Four Gospels. This year, between Advent and Easter our focus is the major dialogues and speeches in the Fourth Gospel (excluding the Upper Room Discourse).

This passage furthers the writer's overall purpose (as he states at the end of the book; 20.31) of helping his readers BELIEVE, "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..." and what THIS passage contributes to that purpose (among other things)...is a fuller picture of what a Christ is... ideas of what the Christ would BE and DO varied widely among John's early readers.

This passage is one that fills the title with meaning... and especially the question of whom the Christ or Messiah had come to save...and this long episode ...presents a surprising answer to that question – He has not so much come to save the “us” but... the “them”...not the similar/alike but the OTHER.

If that’s confusing to you then let me confuse you even more and share my outline. I want to look at:

1. **Jesus AND the Other**
2. **We AND the Other**
3. **We AS the Other**
4. **Jesus AS the Other**
5. **We AS Jesus**

First, the way Jesus of Nazareth deals with people reveals a remarkable freedom on His part from social convention. In the last chapter, WE read of Jesus conversation with a very prominent Jewish clergyman and ruler named Nicodemus... He was the kind of person who “could pull a few strings”... But Jesus seems oblivious to those “connections”... I’m fixated on another time Jesus was asked to heal the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8, Mk 4)... Jairus was another very influential person who would’ve been a great guy to have in your corner...and you’d THINK that Jesus might have done all He could to accommodate the man, in the man’s moment of need ... that Jesus, for instance, would hurry ...drop everything to help this powerful man’s daughter. It was urgent.

BUT on the way this no-name woman crawls through the crowd to touch the hem of Jesus’ robe and Jesus ends up relating with her and calling her “daughter” ... Jairus must have thought, “This is a beggar! What about MY daughter??!”

Jesus is simply blind to our ways of rendering respect to people based on their categories. He seems incapable of giving preferential treatment based on people’s social standing or reputation or power or wealth or gender or race or age.

So, when we come to this FOURTH chapter, we find Jesus treating THIS Samaritan woman of dubious morality the same way He treated the Jewish lawyer Nicodemus in chapter three. His disciples react to Jesus like He’s from another planet, like He just doesn’t GET IT... “Lord! You just don’t DO that!”

She’s a Samaritan (a racially mixed group – half Jewish/half Assyrian), and cultic in their beliefs (theologically mixed up!) AND she’s a WOMAN!!!

... AND she has a very questionable background: married five times and now living with a boyfriend... probably shunned by her own traditional community. She comes to draw water at hot noon (not like normal women who come in the cool early morning!) But Jesus doesn’t GET that

(or at least it doesn't matter!) He not only speaks to her, He wants to drink from her container ... you just don't DO that! But that is how it is with Jesus and the OTHERS.

Now, how about WE and the OTHERS? ... Years ago, I was in a crowded restaurant and I asked the people with me to just look around and identify OTHER people they would be hesitant approaching. Do that, next time you're in a crowded place (...like now).

'Could be white folks... I mean you have white friends... and you like white people but you feel ... just a little different around them, like you can't be totally yourself. Or brown or black people ...or wealthy people...you feel ON YOUR GUARD around them... or people who are into classical music ("they always talk behind your Bach")... OR people who are in to HipHop music ... or gay people... or Confederate Flag type people...disabled or old people...or really good-looking people or strong non-English accents...

AND truth is none of us would say, "Yep, I hate people of that race...I'm a full-fledged BIGOT!" We try to relate to the opposite sex and different kinds of people... BUT to various degrees, some "categories" ... well, it's just hard to be myself around these types ... I find myself trying too hard around them... self-conscious in a way they must sense... the OTHERS.

Third, OURSELVES AS THE OTHER ... we all know to one degree or another... the fear and distress of exclusion...This woman knew exclusion. She is, you know, "THAT woman... who's always with another man..." .... OH! THAT woman!

Her history/identity put her in the "OTHER" class. We don't want to be in the other category... we ALL fear being outside the Inner Ring – it's a theme in The Gospel According to John: the fear of exclusion!)

When we're children...we fear being bullied or chosen last to be on the kick-ball team...or being laughed at when the teacher calls on us and we don't answer the question the right way...of wearing sneakers or clothes that mark us as outdated/poor.

As we get older ...it doesn't go away... we're not so obvious about it but it's still there... the fear of not knowing what others know... (it happens in the church)... a big fear!

AND ultimately ... fear of the ultimate exclusion... a fear that is so terrible most people in OUR hyper tolerant, hyper-egalitarian society, most people have BLOCKED IT OUT OF THEIR MINDS AS A POSSIBILITY...i.e. the fear of being excluded by God Himself... being OTHER in the sight of God...and somehow unacceptable to Him...

This woman actually raises this question...maybe it's a diversionary tactic...trying to get Jesus off the main idea... maybe she's getting uncomfortable ...or maybe she's getting convinced, "I have a prophet on my hands ...let me ask him something I always wanted to know: SHOULD WE WORSHIP

at THE SAMARITAN HOLY SITE OR MUST IT BE THE JEWISH HOLY SITE? (This mountain or that?)–  
Which way of worship makes a person acceptable to God?”

But the Bible’s shocking answer to that question and the whole framework of thinking out of which Jesus Christ is working is that, in the sight of God, WE ARE ALL OTHERS... We do not love as God commands. ...Jesus exposes us in His words: He says to the moral superstars of His day: “You only say hello to the people who first say hello to you... You do good to those who do good to you... You only love the people who love you back in return! You avoid the OTHERS!” (Matt. 5.46-48)

And this is His example, not just His words. He’s showing us, here, what real love looks like... It’s not the favor system and it’s not being nice to those who are nice to US or those who are LIKE US... Real love is impartial to status and not merely tolerating the Other but pursuing them... approaching them...

And the very fact that WE don’t love that way indicates that we don’t love as God loves. Something IN US is unsuited/contrary to God – we’re morally unlike God – WE are OTHER (where it really counts).

AND this otherness in us... is NOT simply our creatureliness... We don’t love as we’re commanded to love, the way Jesus loved, and this is part of what the Bible means when it uses the word sin.

And that sin not only makes us at odds with OTHERS but offensive to God... One of God’s prophets wrote, “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness.” (Hab. 1.13) We’re deeply flawed and guilty of various forms of arrogance... We not only avoid others or resent others or condescendingly “pity” others... but that universal tendency in all of us demonstrates that we ARE Other in the sight of God. Our sin has alienated us from God. Love is His basic command... but we don’t. Sin is obnoxious to God.

BUT the whole MISSION of the Messiah ... and this long story is informing our ideas of what the Messiah IS... He has come to live the perfect life of love that we have failed to live.

We can force ourselves (sometimes!) to be civil and if we’ve been taught to look down or be afraid of certain classes or races... we can make ourselves tolerate the OTHERS... but for Jesus Christ it came as perfectly natural...it was not forced...We’ll look next week at the WAY Jesus Christ obeyed God the Father...suffice it to say now, it was unforced.

AND when He had loved all the OTHERS ...all the sensational sinners (like this Samaritan woman) and loved all the self-righteous bigots like Nicodemus and the jealous Pharisees (v.1)...Then the sinless Jesus Christ... was willing to be regarded as “OTHER” in the sight of His Father...It says in Hebrews Ch. 13: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”

Jesus faced the final dread: exclusion, otherness. He was the only One who really knew what it entailed: HE'D BEEN PERFECTLY IN UNION and in the deepest love with His Father for all eternity (a love that had no beginning) but on the Cross the Human Nature of Jesus became estranged from God AND from people. He became the very symbol of human evil and guilt – John 3.14 ... He's charged with all the Holy God detests... He became other and excluded so that whoever believes in Him could be embraced and included

AND this woman... was coming to see this (not the whole picture but)... she saw that God had come for her... She was NOT looking for Him but He went looking for her...the Father was seeking her and sent the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sons... the Right Man... the Only Man who could complete her!

He offered her a kind of satisfaction that physical water could never give and a fulfillment that no man could ever give ... Who knows how she'd looked for men to FILL the hole in her heart and who knows how men had mistreated and used her? But here, AT LAST, was "the Man of her dreams" who could quench her deepest thirst for life, the One who knew all about her failings and included her anyway.

When she saw that He was the Messiah...Jesus Christ revealed Himself to her like He never did for Nicodemus! He says (final words) "I AM" and she drops her water container: she BECAME THE WATER CONTAINER and she ran away to bring living water to her town (MORE ON THAT NEXT WEEK).

But for now, at the risk of being a spoiler for NEXT WEEK, let's just see that this woman becomes a vessel of Good News... She loses her intimidation about men or about righteous religious people looking down on her... She'd tasted the Living Water and HE began to free her to see herself and to see others differently...She becomes Jesus to her village.

The question that faces us is: Will we drink of this water in such a way that we'll be liberated to see all people as equal: all people are others, separated from God by sin...?

And will we see ourselves as, in some way an extension of Jesus...that WE are vessels who carry living water to people in need?

Will we drink this water that frees us from seeing MEN...or WOMEN... or RICH people or White people...or Spanish speaking people... just people made in the image of God...but estranged from God...and others... all in need of the WATER OF LIFE – the grace of the Gospel.

Maybe you're here today... a Samaritan woman ...or a religious man... a single person... a divorced person... a veteran... a gay person... an old person...party guy... whatever your category.

You may be defined in any number of ways but the Gospel is inviting you to be re-defined as a WORSHIPER ... as an adopted child of God.

A real sinner...whom God has sought and by amazing grace made a SON... filled to overflowing... a container of Living Water for a world looking for love in all the wrong places.

Q U O T E S

The sun burned hot, it burned my eyes  
Burned so hot I thought I'd died  
Thought I'd died and gone to hell  
Lookin' for the water from a deeper well

I went to the river but the river was dry  
I fell to my knees and I looked to the sky  
Looked to the sky and the spring rain fell  
I saw the water from a deeper well

Well  
Lookin' for the water from a deeper well  
Well  
Lookin' for the water from a deeper well

- Emmylou Harris, Daniel Lanois, David Olney; "Deeper Well";  
Track 6 from the 1995 Album: *Wrecking Ball*

We see them daily in the streets in our living rooms, we pass by them on the streets. They are our colleagues and neighbors, some of them even our spouses. The others are among us; they are part of us. They remain others, often pushed to the margins. How should we relate to them? Should we celebrate their difference, and support it, or should we bemoan and suppress it? The issue is urgent. The ghettos and battlefields throughout the world, testify indisputably to its importance.

I suggest that the categories of "exclusion and embrace" as two paradigm responses to otherness can do a better job. They need to be placed at the center of a theological reflection on otherness, an endeavor I would like to term a "theology of embrace."

-- Judith M. Gundry-Volf and Miroslav Volf,  
*A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging*