

AT THE WELL
[written oral form]

John 4:5-42
Lent 3, Year A

March 15, 2020
Gordon Allaby

With all that is going on, I was tempted to focus on the virus issue.
Yet, I think we need a sense of normalcy, so I am sticking with the designated text for today.

However, the John text presents Jesus radically breaking the rules of normalcy.
It is a story about finding salvation.

I think most of us are looking for salvation, especially these days.

~~~~~  
Salvation is deeply embedded in Christian theology and jargon, and rightly so; however, it's presentation is not always faithful to the Bible.

Much of the Christianity, in its many flavours, has altered / reconstructed Salvation into a simple package.

The organized church has, by and large, been selling salvation, and that makes the church a broker,.....instead of the body of Christ.

Some segments of Christianity present salvation as claiming a few basic premises, and then cashing in Jesus as the way to be saved.

That fundamental theology is very clean and polished, much like a brand new car,.....and that makes sense.

Who wants to buy a big box full of nearly 14,000 parts and take the time to assemble a new car?  
Who would buy that?

Yet, when I read the Bible, I perceive **the process** of salvation as just that: a process of healing and putting the broken pieces of relationships back together.

~~~~~  
It is far more desirable to buy into a ready to drive, easy to use salvation, but..... the problem is: we are the ones who took the wholeness apart. We are holding the broken pieces.
And, we--all of us are thirsty for wholeness and healing.

~~~~~  
To the text:  
Speaking of burning up and dying of thirst, the episode in today's text begins just that way.

Jesus was in the midst of a long journey. He was walking through Samaria on his way to Galilee, and he was very parched.

Samaria was a region that was a blend of Jews and pagan, both in blood and in theology. Jews tried to avoid Samaritans because they were regarded as worse than foreigners. They were Jewish enough to make pure Jews uncomfortable. They were sort of alike, yet different, and that just felt weird.

~~~~~

It was noon. Jesus was tired, hot and very thirsty, so thirsty that he stopped by the well, at the edge of town, instead of joining his disciples who went to the town's market.

Unfortunately for Jesus, he didn't have a bucket to scoop up the water. Either he was too tired to move on or was waiting for someone to come to the well.

Low and behold, someone did come to the well at the hottest time of the day. But, that person was a woman, and everyone would know that only women on the fringe / only women rejected by society would have to collect water in the middle of the day. She was Not allowed to join others during the cooler times of the day.

This creates a sticky situation. She had to be there; it is the only time she can get water, yet there is a man there. She has an undeniable need, yet to make matters worse, this man appears to be Jewish.

She was likely thinking, "Maybe he will leave." But, he did not, so with her eyes focused downward, pretending he was not there, she drew some water for herself.

And then, Jesus did the unthinkable. Jesus asked her for a drink. This was shocking in many ways:

Jews did not associate with Samaritans; sharing a cup of water would have made a Jew ritually impure. And worse, men were not supposed to talk to women in public places, not even to their own wives,.....and she was a Samaritan woman of disrespect.

A crisis was unfolding. The burden was on the woman to avoid "contaminating" a man. She the victim would be blamed.

The victim would be blamed.....

~~~~~

To say the least, this interaction was scandalous!

A single, Jewish man, talking and drinking from the same cup with a single, Samaritan woman with a shadow full of rumours,...all out in open,.....as if they were equals! This is shocking!

It was so scandalous, that later in the narrative, we are told that when the disciples caught the two of them together, the disciples did Not say a word. They were that shocked and dumfounded.

~~~~~

A brief digression:

There is a great lesson in this passage. This story is written down for us to experience.

I understand that some of us have been uncomfortable with the rainbow signs and the two informative adult ed sessions about sexuality and identity.

What we are doing is we are meeting at the well, and that could be uncomfortable.

We are going there to repent for our past exclusions and condemnations. Our presence and acceptance is a form of repentance. We are sorry for our past behaviour.
We are going to the well as equals, so that we can learn.

Just like Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we need each other.
We need each other for redemption / salvation / wholeness/ healing.

~~~~~  
Back to the story:

Jesus openly speaking to the woman and sharing a drink with her tore away some of the barriers and some of her defensive walls.

Instead of shunning him, and quietly leaving as she should have, she continued the exchange. The woman asked Jesus why he was breaking so many cultural expectations. She asked him why he was so different.

Jesus then alluded to her that he was no ordinary Jew, and that he had something she needed--living water.

His response was perplexing, and she was not sure if she should trust him. No doubt, she had learned the hard way, that the men in her life could not be trusted. Yet, this man was different, so she willingly kept the conversation going.

~~~~~  
Jesus explained that H2O water only quenches the thirst for a short while. It is much like other physical things we need and desire.

~~~~~  
*The latest song meets a need, but gets old.  
Gadgets, cell phones, cars, TVs, you name it, meet a need for just a short while, then we need to replace them with the newest model.  
In a way, it's madness.*

*I have dozens and dozens of old cassette tapes, once marvellous, now worthless.*

~~~~~  
However, Jesus offered "living water" that completely and permanently satisfies,... and more. Once consumed, it gushes out like a Spring fed fountain, and it never ends. The water Jesus has quenches the real thirst / the real deep down inside need, and it pours out to others, just as Jesus is doing for the woman.

~~~~~  
The woman eagerly asks for his water. She wants to end her thirst, and she wants to end the pain and humiliation of having to go to the well alone in the midday sun. She wants a better life. She wants wholeness.

~~~~~  
Do you see what is happening?

Walls are being torn down. Pretense and barriers are being removed, and the door to the soul is cracking open.

~~~~~

The overarching message in the story is that faith in Jesus is a source of living and vibrant relationships with God and everyone, yet the profound aspect is that Jesus is showing HOW this happens / How this is received.

**Jesus is demonstrating HOW to be saved.**

~~~

And, it all began with Jesus being **humble** and expressing his need.
Jesus was being humble and expressing his need.
Jesus was living salvation.

~~~~~

In verse 16, Jesus invites the woman to be honest and vulnerable / to open up even more.

Verse 17 is her truthful and straightforward answer, which reveals her willingness to be vulnerable with Jesus--to Trust Jesus.

Out in the open is her history of five husbands and her current, non-marital relationship with a man.

Please note: Jesus did not scold her or condemn her. Instead, he praised her for her revealing honesty.

Moreover, we do not know the details of her past, yet most readers tend to think the worst about the woman.

We don't know the reasons she had five husbands.

Some could have died. She could be trapped--traded for livestock.  
Some may have abandoned her. And, the man she is living with may be out of necessity for her own survival.  
We don't know,.....moreover..... it does Not matter to Jesus.

Jesus DID NOT ask her to repent, like he did the rich man.

Jesus did NOT shame her or criticize her.  
In contrast, Jesus told and demonstrated the way to be in living water.

~~~~~

The woman is amazed, and..... she is changing.
At first, she called Jesus a Jew, then she labelled him a prophet, and finally, she is seeing him as the Messiah.

She is starting to believe in Jesus.
And then,.....a further demonstration / a continued act of trust and love,.....Jesus admits to her to be The Messiah.

Those who believe in Jesus, they recognize the Messiah.
To everyone else,..... it is hidden.

~~~~~  
The woman left her water jar behind, and went back to town, gushing and overflowing like a surging Spring fountain, witnessing to all about her encounter with the Messiah.

~~~~~  
She meets a man, but no it is Jesus the Messiah.
Jesus bears witness to God's way of living in grace and abundance.
And, she witnesses to all, revealing her belief and trust in Jesus.

~~~~~  
The woman did Not go out looking for Jesus.  
It just happened. Usually, encounters with the divine "just happen" in surprising and unique ways.

~~~~~  
Interestingly, The Samaritan woman did not repent. There is NO mention of repenting.
She did not need to repent because she was beyond false presence.
She was a hurting victim, and she held out her brokenness to Jesus.

~~~~~  
From time to time, a few people have told me that I need to preach more about salvation,.....as if it is a product to be sold.

I find it fascinating that fundamentalists preach such a polished message with excited assertions that they have the answer.

The fundamentalist message presents certainty and calls it faith, yet  
**I do not understand that reasoning.**  
Faith is the opposite of certainty.

In contrast, Jesus treats an outcast as an equal.  
He shares his own need, and asks her for help.  
In turn, she shares, then he shares, then she opens up and he opens up, and before long....there is living water all over the place.

And,.....that.... is how you put the broken pieces back together.

This scandalous exchange was an encounter at the well,.....and much more.

It is tempting to call this story a plan of salvation, but more accurately, it is a model for receiving living water.

Jesus and the woman demonstrated how to end the soul's thirst for wholeness.

At the well, there was no hoarding or exploiting, nor was there arrogance or abuse.  
There was no bartering, trading or buying.

Nobody was belittled. Nobody was judged. Nobody was shamed.  
The cultural rules and expectations were cast aside, because an authentic exchange was valued and explored.

At the well, nobody injected moral correctness; nobody obeyed old traditions, and neither one rejected the other.

Right or wrong was not discussed because what mattered most was equally shared.  
Each had the other's missing pieces.

Truth, humility, self disclosing personal needs, fears and desires, at great risk and vulnerability were placed out in the open.  
And, that is what opens the soul to living water.

~~~~~

What a fascinating encounter in the mid day sun, at the well.
What a surprise.
What a fascinating way to see how connecting with God develops?

~~~~~  
~~~~~

Perhaps, the LGBTQ community has exactly what we need?
Perhaps, they need what we have to offer?

Maybe, this pandemic will lead us to the well.

We may learn what is truly important, and we may be surprised by who or what provides us with what we need.

~~~~~

The world is turned upside down. There is much fear and brokenness.

We are surrounded by broken pieces: the planet, our culture and people we encounter, including ourselves. We are broken.

~~~~~

We are entering unknown territory.
The situation is like being out in the scorching mid day sun.
We thirst.

There is a well, but we do not have a bucket.
Someone is approaching with one.

Someone is by the well without a bucket, how strange.

God is here.....at the well. We are at the well where living water gushes freely.