

Opening prayer

Holy One, sometimes we are outsiders, even to ourselves, avoiding admitting our own faults, doubts and sins to ourselves.

Fearful others and You will judge us and find us unworthy...un-worth...anything.

Reconciling God, teach us to be honest with confidence and humility. Trusting that we are awash in your grace .

Call us out in the heat of the day to stand alongside those who must wait at the well.

Call us out to the forgotten and forbidden crossroads where Jesus liked to linger.

Call us inward to those corners of our hearts we dare not dust.

Help us to shake off our shame and transcend our guilt.

Help us to see beneath earthly expectations to your incarnation, in each person we meet.

Help us to drink of the living water that we might help quench the true thirst of the world. Amen.

Scripture John 4:5-42.

Reflection on the text:

Last week the scripture was about Nicodemus

Today we have the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

The contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman is striking. Given the fact that they appear one right after the other in the Gospel, we are meant to notice this contrast in all of its detail.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee—an insider, a leader of the Jews. He is a man, he has a name, but he comes to Jesus by night

She is a woman, she has no name, she is a Samaritan—a religious, social, and political outsider., but she meets Jesus at noon, in full daylight.

Nicodemus is unable to move beyond the confines of his religious system,

The woman moves outside of her Samaritan religious expectations to engage Jesus in theological debate about the Jewish teaching on God and the Savior.

Whereas Nicodemus has heard and suspects that Jesus is sent by God, and yet has lots of questions and doubts. “Are you the One?”

The woman at the well has not heard of this Jesus, this stranger before her yet, she is actively expecting that God’s promised Savior will come. “I know the Savior will come!”

While Nicodemus’s last questioning words to Jesus expose his disbelief “How can these things be?”

the last words of the woman at the well “He cannot be the Christ, can he?” lead her to witness to her whole town.

She is a Samaritan; N is a Jew. She has a shameful past; he is a respected moral leader in his community.

The fact that John presents the entire Nicodemus story in 9 verses. While he devotes more than 40 to the Woman. makes the contrast between the

conversations these two characters have with Jesus even more extraordinary.

At a literary level the woman stands as a foil to Nicodemus, but in her own right she plays an important role in the Gospel narrative.

She is almost totally an outsider. A woman in a man’s world, she is a stranger to Judaism, the practices and geography of faith, and conventional morality,

Is she so much of an outsider that she is considered socially deviant by her community? Is she ostracized by them, stigmatized for her status or behavior? We cannot determine this from the text, and so to go that far is to perhaps exaggerate the woman’s outsider status.

We may be able to say, however, that in the eyes of the Gospel writer this woman is a nobody. She does not even merit a name, and her gender, religious orientation, social standing, and personal habits distance her from Jesus and her community.

We expect that people will try to avoid this woman and ignore her whenever possible.

Being a nobody is not an easy mantle to wear.

This text is good news for anyone who has ever felt the humiliation of stigmatization or the pain of being a nobody, of being abused or even just ignored!

Jesus does not turn away from this woman. On the contrary, he engages her in conversation, takes her seriously, and spends several days in her village. This woman, her community, and their welfare matter to Jesus, whether nobodies or not. **That is good news.**

This text reminds faithful readers that sometimes our attempts to draw the boundaries of our faith and our communities are too narrow.

We often prefer to leave out the nobodies, but Jesus does not do that. He welcomes outsiders, as well as insiders, into discipleship.

He also welcomes people who are just starting the journey of faith OR find their faith is not as strong as it once was.

She is a newcomer to faith in Jesus, and during this conversation with Jesus she takes baby steps.

Jesus is so patient with her! His willingness to explain his metaphors and stay with the conversation is in stark contrast to his impatient discussion with

Nicodemus." You are a teacher of the Law and YOU DON'T understand???"

Jesus does not make fun of this woman, as he does of Nicodemus, and he does not chastise her for her left-brain response to his right-brain language. Instead, he nurtures her, nudges her along, like a parent teaching a young child. Though he is hard on Nicodemus, Jesus is kind to this woman.

Jesus can be confrontational, and he can be compassionate. He can be unyielding, and he can be generous. We see his tenderness as he encourages the woman's growth in faith. Any believer who feels like a newcomer to faith and who is also taking baby steps can take heart in this. Jesus supports us as we move toward him and grow in understanding. He wants us to deepen and extend our faith, to recognize and acknowledge him for who he is.

Jesus can be tough too, and the woman gets a taste of that. In the course of her conversation with him, he uncovers her life story. The exposure comes as Jesus talks with her about her husband and looks beneath her self-presentation.

She says of Jesus that he “told me everything I have ever done” (v. 29). There is an honesty in the woman’s encounter with Jesus that lays open her past, yet she does not appear to be shamed by this conversation and confession.

Instead, her encounter with Jesus emboldens the woman to go and tell all her friends and neighbors about this man.

Whether the multitude of husbands she has had and her “living in sin” with the present man in her life is fact or part of an ancient storyteller’s craft of exaggeration to make a point....it does make a really important point for all of us.

She is accepted by Jesus, without judgment, without condemnation exactly as she is, exactly for who she is, complete with all her baggage, history and guilt.

In fact, the woman is only freed for discipleship after Jesus exposes her needs and failings.

Why do we have a Confession at every worship service? Because we are human and making mistakes and having regrets is part of our DNA!

Why do we pronounce Forgiveness and Share the Peace that only Jesus can bring? Because the Bible means what it says!!

God made you and God loves you just the way you are

This story narrates the dramatic transformation of the woman. She begins the story as an outsider and becomes a witness; from her status as a beginner in faith she becomes an apostle sent by Jesus himself to testify on his behalf.

As such she is a model not just for women, not just for people who feel like nobodies, not just for newcomers to the faith, and not just for people with a past.

Jesus encounters and welcomes many into the household of faith—even the least likely and hard as it might be to believe ...

maybe, even, you and me.

Closing Prayer

Jesus ignored rules and spoke to a lone woman. We, like her, seek the Water of Life. We, like her, look for a promise of thirst-quenching hope. As we leave this place, God goes with us, quenching our thirst and filling our emptiness