

John 4:1-26 (CEV)

Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard that he was winning and baptizing more followers than John was. ² But Jesus' disciples were really the ones doing the baptizing, and not Jesus himself.

³ Jesus left Judea and started for Galilee again. ⁴ This time he had to go through Samaria, ⁵ and on his way he came to the town of Sychar. It was near the field that Jacob had long ago given to his son Joseph. ⁶⁻⁸ The well that Jacob had dug was still there, and Jesus sat down beside it because he was tired from traveling. It was noon, and after Jesus' disciples had gone into town to buy some food, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well.

Jesus asked her, "Would you please give me a drink of water?"

⁹ "You are a Jew," she replied, "and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink of water when Jews and Samaritans won't have anything to do with each other?"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "You don't know what God wants to give you, and you don't know who is asking you for a drink. If you did, you would ask me for the water that gives life."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you don't even have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get this life-giving water? ¹² Our ancestor Jacob dug this well for us, and his family and animals got water from it. Are you greater than Jacob?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again. ¹⁴ But no one who drinks the water I give will ever be thirsty again. The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman replied, "Sir, please give me a drink of that water! Then I won't get thirsty and have to come to this well again."

¹⁶ Jesus told her, "Go and bring your husband."

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ The woman answered, "I don't have a husband."

"That's right," Jesus replied, "you're telling the truth. You don't have a husband. You have already been married five times, and the man you are now living with isn't your husband."

¹⁹ The woman said, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ My ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews say Jerusalem is the only place to worship."

²¹ Jesus said to her:

Believe me, the time is coming when you won't worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans don't really know the one you worship. But we Jews do know the God we worship, and by using us, God will save the world. ²³ But a time is coming, and it is already here! Even now the true worshipers are being led by the Spirit to worship the Father according to the truth. These are the ones the Father is seeking to worship him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship God must be led by the Spirit to worship him according to the truth.

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that the Messiah will come. He is the one we call Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ "I am that one," Jesus told her, "and I am speaking to you now."

"Stories"

Several summers ago, a father and his son were out for a walk in a farmer's field in northern England. The son had brought a metal detector with him, and all of the sudden, it started to squeal. They decided to dig up whatever was buried, and what they brought out of the ground was a metal bowl, that turned out to be over 1000 years old, buried by Vikings. And it was filled with over 600 gold and silver coins! The father and son thought they were just out for a normal afternoon walk -- but they ended up finding a great treasure that day! What a story! That is one that will be told over and over for many generations.

Our Scripture "story" for today is very similar. It is the tale of a woman who went on a normal day's activity -- to get some water from the well -- and yet she found more than she ever expected. More than just some silver and gold coins, this woman found eternal life in faith in Jesus Christ. In the same way, perhaps you have thought that today would be just a "normal" day at church -- but God may have something more in store for you. Maybe this is the day that you, like the woman in this story, will find eternal life through Jesus Christ.

This scripture story gives us the opportunity to experience the longest recorded conversation Jesus has ever had, and it is with a Samaritan woman! This unnamed woman calls Jesus by many names: prophet, Messiah, Lord -- as she recognizes and accepts the gifts he offers. In her openness to the good news she receives in this life-changing conversation, she leaves her water jar, the symbol of what she thought needed to be filled,

at the well, and she goes back into town. She now desires that others be filled to the brim with the same transforming experience that she had with Jesus. This story does not just belong to the nameless Samaritan woman, for she immediately shared the story with the townsfolk of Jesus, the Christ, and the salvation he brings. It is a story of redemption; a story of God's promises fulfilled. This is the story of Jesus reaching beyond the borders of cultural divides. This story challenges the isolation of our comfort zones, and the human limits placed on God's love and care. ***When one has a story like that, it must be shared!***

We mark our lives and faith development through stories, don't we? My life is marked by stories of powerful experiences in youth ministry, as a college student, when I heard God's voice calling me by name and sending me forth to share the good news. My life is marked by stories of interactions with parishioners and communities, of birth, of parenting, of death, of change.

I was reminded this week that it was the anniversary of the blizzard of 1993. Where I was living in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the snow was above my waist, was too heavy to shovel, and most folks needed to stay put until a loader could come by to dig out each driveway. Well that is fine, unless you are one of my parishioners who was having heart attacks, and his granddaughter who was trying to give birth to a 12 pound baby. Getting emergency medical help to them through a 300 yard driveway was an experience that created a story that even made the front page of the Scranton Times. For decades, those of us who witnessed this event have told the story of the neighbors who arrived with shovels, ATV's, sleds, and eventually a bulldozer. We have told the story of the dispatcher who offered prayers on the airwaves for the paramedics who risked their lives to aid in the crisis. Grandfather Henry told of his near-death experience of seeing Christ, and then awakening just in time to witness the birth of his great-granddaughter. And for the first 14 years of Zaia's life, her grandfather Henry told the story of those who saved their lives so that they could bless their families, and bear witness to God's miracles. Zaia now tells the story to her children! That is a story has that shaped lives and faith, not just in the moment, but for now a second generation! For they had experienced so much more than anyone could have expected!

These stories are so powerful because they are stories of redemption. These are moments when the chasm between the human and the divine nearly disappears. Hearts are warmed. Miracles are recognized. Lives are transformed.

Friends, it is possible that we are now witnessing the circumstances in which these stories of God's touch on humanity will be recorded and retold for generations. The unique circumstances thrust upon us by the spread and fear of Corona Virus will, I have no doubt, bring about situations where God's activity through Christ and through saints on earth will be abundantly clear. Watch and listen for the accounts of miracles, of kindness, of extraordinary service, of love and care, of compassionate hands and hearts that relieve suffering, calm anxieties, and that bring a joy that overcomes fear.

I am hoping that each one of us has at least one redemption story -- of experiencing the amazing care of God that can be claimed as "my story," "your story," and "God's story" with each of us. Perhaps you have come here today anticipating just a "normal Sunday." That is not possible today. Our faith family, our community, nation, and world are fraught with anxiety. God is with us! Jesus has redemption in store for each of us. The Holy Spirit will guide us through this. And we will have a story to tell!!

Jesus was the solution for the Samaritan woman. Jesus has a solution for each of us, too. Christ cares about every facet of our wellbeing and would like to draw us closer. As we journey with Jesus ever closer to Jerusalem and the agonizing days of holy week, we realize the power, and comfort, and freedom of a relationship with a Savior who was willing to die for us!

Rev. Shawn Thomas wrote of today's scripture story: *"Just like that woman at the well, if you will admit your sin, and trust Jesus as our Savior, you can be washed from all your sin, get a real relationship with God and eternal life in heaven. And like that woman, you can then sing: 'This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long. This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.'"*