

Sermon for July 1st 2018

“The Samaritan Woman at the well”

John 4:1-42

Jesus had a divine appointment with the woman at the well and with the residents of her village.

The outcome was that outcasts were born again from above (See John Three).

From a Jewish perspective the wind of the Holy Spirit had blown in a most unexpected direction.

Jews hated Samaritans.

The might think the tension between Palestinians and Israelis is savage but it pails to insignificance when compared to Jews and Samaritans.

Pharisees had a favourite prayer for Samaritans: “that none of them would experience the resurrection to eternal life”.

If a Jewish person wanted to insult someone he called that someone a “Samaritan Devil”.

That’s what they called Jesus in John 8: 48 NLT.

Jews hated Samaritans so much that they wouldn’t use or even handle anything touched by a Samaritan.

The story of the Good Samaritan must have caused great offence to the Jewish leaders.

This extra-ordinary hatred arose after the Assyrian captivity of the 10 Northern Tribes at the height of Assyrian dominance.

In their place the Assyrians brought in people from five neighbouring countries and resettled them in what at Jesus time as called Samaria.

These foreign refugees integrated with the remaining Jews. The pure blood Jews treated them as impure half-castes.

Now there were three ways to get from Judea to galilee (both Jewish territory).

Two detoured around Samaria. The third went straight through Samaria. Jews normally took the former two ways despite the extra distance.

In the opening verses of this account we read that Jesus “had to go” through Samaria. Older translations translate “It was necessary that he go through Samaria”

Why was it necessary? Well the events that follow in the account show us why.

Jesus had a divine appointment with the woman at the well and with the residents of her village.

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From a Jewish perspective the wind of the Holy Spirit had blown in a most unexpected direction.

And so we read how Jesus meets this woman at the well, and as with Nicodemus, Jesus gets right to the point and offers the gift of living water.

That’s new birth, new life, and resurrection life.

Contrary to popular perceptions, neither the text nor Jesus seems to indicate that she was an immoral person.

What if each of those marriages ended when the husband died. She would have buried five husbands.

She would have gone through five funerals. The pain and suffering and loss in her life would be great -- perhaps too great for her to commit herself in marriage to another man.

Maybe this is why she wants to come to the well alone. Her pain is too great to talk about it with anyone else.

Maybe this is what has sapped the life out of her.

What if each of those marriages ended when an abusive husband got tired of her and threw her out of the house and divorced her.

What if she had spent her life being victimized by these men and then was discarded like garbage?

Maybe she had become so distrustful of marriage that she wouldn't go through the ritual with the sixth man.

Perhaps bruises on her body kept her from associating with other people?

Could the terror in her mind keep her from talking to anyone about her suffering?

Is that why she is alone? Is that what has sapped the life out of her.

Maybe that's why she came alone to the well in the middle of the day.

Normally women went there in the morning and evening.

In any case, whatever her situation Jesus offers her something too good to be true and too wonderful to turn down.

Jesus offers her living water.

Just as natural water gives life to our bodies living water brings a new quality of life without end – eternal life.

Jesus tells the woman that this living water is what she needs to have real life and life in its fullest.

Many years ago the Coca-Cola Company found a unique way to advertise their product.

They called it the Arrrrh! Effect. It proved very effective. The catch line was "The Pause that refreshes"

You've been working or playing hard. You've worked up a giant thirst. You crack open a can of Coke and take a long swig.

The next sound out of the actor's mouth is a long satisfied Arrrrh!

What works as an advertising gimmick for a soft drink company is a profound spiritual truth in the Christian life.

When we drink living water we will never thirst again says Jesus.

That's because in Jesus we discover everything necessary for real life.

In fact that was the title of yet another Coke Advertisement.

Every other belief system will leave us thirsty and in search of a newer way to satisfy our inner longing for security, significance and peace.

Every guru's promise comes up short and ultimately leaves us thirsting for something deeper and more meaningful.

Only Jesus has the key to real life.

John's account doesn't give us the rest of the woman's story. Although we get a few hints. See John 4:29-30 and 39-42.

John's aim is to focus on the gift that Jesus offers to all who turn to him in faith.

He wants us to see ourselves in the place of this woman.

You may be thinking that Jesus could never love someone like you.

The things you've seen, done and thought. If only he knew. But hang on. Doesn't he already know? "You have had five husbands"

No friend. Jesus will deem it necessary to go out of his way to rescue sinners like you and me.