

“This is Our Story; This is Our Song: At the Well”

OT: Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 98
NT: Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42

Read Romans 5:1-11

Lent is a season of reflection and penitence. Every year as we enter the Lenten season we are reminded of our mortality; ashes are either physically or spiritually used to mark a cross on our foreheads with the words “remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Our human frailty is a real thing. None of us ever really know how long we have in this earthly sojourn but it seems the longer we grow in life the more precious we believe life is. But Lent is not just a season to remind us how fragile or short life can be. Lent is not really about us at all. I mean, we are a variable in the equation, but we are not the most important variable. Lent is about God and God’s relationship with humanity. Our call to reflection and penitence is because of God. In our frailty and weakness, which is what often drives us to reflect, God’s strength and power are most prevalent. In our sin and brokenness, which is what drives us to penitence, God’s grace and mercy and salvation are at work mending and making us whole again. Lent is a season in which we are called to reflect on the story of God invading the story of humanity, so humanity can and will say,

“Praise be to the Lord. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains.... The sea is his... and the dry land. Let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” (Psalm 95)

More often than not the stories we encounter in Lent, like the wilderness story from Exodus or the one we are going to look at in a moment when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well, leave us saying so what? What does a group of people in the wilderness thousands of years ago and woman at the well thousands of years ago have to do with us today? Well, in light of our current wilderness story, amidst a viral pandemic, perhaps these stories will connect us a little closer with God and reveal to us what we all need to be drawing from the well of life.

This particular Lenten season we have been invited to engage in story and song. And not just anyone’s story or anyone’s song, but ours. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, every story throughout history held compassionately in God’s hands is a part of our story. Our story, our song, is formed on the unmistakable love of God exemplified to God’s people through all time.

We read three texts already as our scripture lessons today, but there is one more included in the lectionary that is a hard one not to share; partly because of its dramatic invasion but mostly because of its timeless reality and reminder of God's gracious and loving presence. Rather than simply read it, I would like to offer a reflection by Jan Boers, who tells the story of the Woman at the Well from the perspective of the Samaritan Woman. The text in scripture is John 4:5-42. Warning that Jan uses the derogatory term "slut" to refer to how the Samaritan woman is perceived.

"Livin' water." That's what he promised that day by the well. "Livin' water." Shoot, I didn't know what he meant by it. I only just knew that here was this Jewish rabbi, sittin' by the well . . . first askin' me for water . . . and then turnin' around later and offerin' me somethin' I hadn't never heard of before . . . "livin' water."

It had started out like any other day. The sun come up ordinary-like. Jake got up . . . ornery-like. I'd learned to stay clear of Jake on mornin's like that—mornin's when the night-before's wine soured his breath and flared his temper.

I shuddered as I heard him liftin' the water jar to the basin, knowin' what I'd hear. . . . "Lazy, good-for-nothin' slut. Not enough water in here to . . . Woman—been layin' around again doin' nothin', ain't ya? Jar's empty again. Don't ya go givin' me that sob story 'bout how ya can't go to the well when the other women's there. You listen to me, woman! This here water jar better be filled up to the top and settin' right where it belongs the next time I'm in need of washin' up! You hear me?"

I didn't mind so much the slap he give me. I deserved it . . . a woman's duty is to keep the water jar full up to the top. Besides, his cuff didn't cut me nearly so deep as the rebuff I was used to gettin' from the women at the well. Their looks cut deep. Their looks screamed, "Just who does she think she is . . . showin' up here with us . . . just like she was one of us or somethin'?" Their silences cut deep. Their silences screamed, "Just who does she think she is . . . standin' here next to us . . . just like she was somebody decent or somethin'?"

I'd take Jake's slap to my face any day over that! Besides . . . good thing about Jake is, after he takes a swipe or two at me—after the fog of the wine clears from his head—he can be almost . . . gentle-like. He's real sorry and all. It's just that he's got a "thirst"—a thirst that he just can't seem to quench.

Anyways, like I was sayin', it started out like any other day. Jake left to do whatever it is men do durin' the day. There was just enough water in the jar for me to wet a rag or two. I pressed the cool of it up against my face until the swellin' went down. I did as many chores that didn't require water as I could. Noon came. 'Bout then I knew the time was right for me to make my way to the well.

Evenin' is the time for most to draw water. There's none too many out on the street at high noon. It's the best time of the day to avoid contact with those who hold you "at a distance." Since I have no one to walk with and talk with on the way to the well, I like to pass the walk time by "fairy talin'." Ya know what I mean? "Happy endin'." I think about how things are and how they could've been.

Like, what if Judas—he was my first husband and the love of my life—what if he hadn't died so young? Guess it's true what they say about "the good die young." What if I'd had a son by him? Then I wouldn't have had to marry Judas's brother, Jabesh. He didn't want me anyway. . . . What if Jabesh hadn't divorced me and forced me into marriage with Jabar? What if Jabar hadn't died? He was a good man . . . poor, but good. Older than Methusaleh, but good. Wasn't much chance I'd have a son by him! But he was a good man. What if my marriage to Levi would have worked out? Not that there was much chance of that either. He was a mean-spirited man. What if I had never married Zadar? . . . What if Deborah hadn't caught Zadar's fancy after we'd married? . . . What if Zadar hadn't gone off with her to who-knows-where before obtainin' a divorce decree from the elders of the city? What if Jake and I could get married . . . and what if we had a son? A son who was brighter and faster and

handsomer than any of the sons of those who cut me out. My son would have Jake's thirst for the good things in life . . . but not his thirst for wine. My son would have my love for people . . . but not their disdain for me. My son would marry a fine girl who would do me the honor of drawin' water from the well for me. Fairy talin' . . . happy endin'!

He was already sittin' there when I approached. I could see right away he wasn't from these parts—he was a Jew, and he looked to be a teacher or a rabbi. I expected the usual down-lookin' from him that we Samaritans have received from Jews for as long as we can remember.

I expected it double . . . bein' as I was not only a Samaritan but a woman as well. "Unclean" they call us—like we was dogs or somethin'!

So I looked at that man just sitting there and thought, "He's one of them. Just another one of them that thinks he's better than me. Just another one of them thinkin', 'There she is . . . a Samaritan woman! Just who does she think she is, comin' to this well? Just who does she think she is, comin' anywhere near me? Why, one tiny brush from her skirt could keep me out of the synagogue for weeks!"

But I didn't know what he was thinkin'. Instead of shooin' me away, he asked me, real polite-like, "Will you give me a drink?"

It was easy to see why he'd be askin'. The sun was hotter than blue blazes, his clothes were sweated up like he'd been walkin' awhile, and he was empty-handed. He needed me! I had the upper hand for a change! He needed me to draw him some water.

Know how ya can be when the upper hand is yours and ya know it? Know how it is when ya really want to be talkin' to somebody . . . anybody, but the pride in ya keeps ya from givin' 'em so much as a side glance? Know how sometimes the venom that's been gnawin' at your belly just spills out and ya lay on some innocent victim the anger that's just pushin' to get out?

I soon regretted the angry words I spit at him. "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"

He didn't get riled by the words or the anger. Instead, he told me strange things. Things about living water, and water that makes people never thirst again. He asked about Jake. Well, he didn't really ask about Jake, he asked me to go to get my husband. And when I told him, kinda cocky-like, that I didn't have a husband . . . [very subdued] . . . he told me he knew . . . then he told me everything I ever did.

[Moves from shame to excitement] I knew right off he was some kind of prophet, and after he said a couple more things I got to wonderin' [increases excitement] . . . Could he be the one? Could he be the Messiah they're always talkin' about? Could he be? . . .

My mind got to runnin' with the thought of it. It was like fairy talin', but for real. What if he was the one? What if . . . what if . . . ? Before I knew what was happenin', my feet was runnin' too. Runnin' right into town . . . right to the people who never had so much as the time of day for me. Then my mouth started runnin' too . . . and words just spilled out: "Come and see . . . Come and see the man who told me everything I ever did! Could he be the Christ?"

Now, I don't know if they went to the well to hear about all I ever did . . . 'cause I know some of them had really been ponderin' on that . . . or if they went because they wanted to see the prophet who might be the Christ. I don't know why they went, but they went runnin'!

Next thing I knew I was runnin' home. I threw open the door, and I run smack into Jake! "Jake, I got somethin' to tell ya that ya just aren't gonna believe. . . . Jake, you've been drinkin' again, haven't ya, Jake! . . . Just hear me

out, OK? Jake, I . . . the water jar? Why, I musta left it by the well! That's what I gotta tell ya about, Jake. There was . . . yeh . . . yeh . . . I know what ya told me, Jake. Yeh, I know ya wanted it right there where it belongs when ya got home. . . . Yeh, and filled to the top! I heard ya, Jake! But ya gotta hear me out!"

Jake! I went to get the water! Honest I did! Just like you told me! Jake! I met a man there! No . . . not that kinda met! I met a man who has a special kinda water! Jake, if you drink it, you'll never be thirsty again! It'll quench that thirst you got so deep inside of you, Jake. Jake, come and see! Come and see this man who told me everything I ever did! Come and see!

It had started out like any other day. The sun had come up ordinary just like any other day. But it didn't stay ordinary. That was the day when I went to the well, and a man named Jesus was there. He told me about something called living water. It's water . . . that . . . when you drink of it . . . it quenches a thirst way deep down inside. Oh! Come and see!

The sun had come up ordinary just like any other day. But it didn't stay ordinary.

In this story, Jesus reveals himself to the woman as 3 things (Stephanie Englehart):

1. Jesus is the living water, which is more than a simple remedy of thirst. True fulfillment in life comes from our relationship and trust in God- not in water, riches, more men or women. With God, we no longer are in need of the next best thing, because being in relationship with God is the best thing that will ever happen to us.
2. Jesus is a prophet or a messenger of God's who knows. God knows and God cares. We are sinners and God still comes to us, seeks us out, loves us, and gives us purpose.
3. Jesus is the messiah, the Christ, the anointed one. It is time we open our eyes and realize who Jesus really is; our Lord and Savior.

Our story, our song, is that the Lord meets us where we are- in the wilderness, at the well.

For the Israelites in the wilderness asking, "Is the Lord among us?" ...

The Israelites were going in a direction they had never gone. They didn't know what the next bend was going to bring them. They were anxious. They were lost. They were confused. They were filled with fear. These emotions caused them to begin to question God's presence among them. Just when they thought they were beginning to lose hope, God showed up and provided for them. God did this for the Israelites every step of the way. All throughout history, the story of God's people is one of love and protection.

For the Samaritan woman who met the Lord in a place at a time she didn't expect...

The woman at the well encountered the unimaginable that day at noon. Her life was in turmoil. She was so far in the weeds she couldn't see out. She was shocked. She was invaded. She was turned around. Just when she thought that day at the well would mean the same old draw of water, she encountered the living water and became empowered and inspired. She became a servant to the one true King. She became a messenger, proclaiming the good news. She became a leader.

For you and me. For all those who follow God in faith. With God's presence comes protection. With God's protection comes providence. With God's providence comes prosperity.

The good news for us is as Paul declares, "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings (and isn't much of the world suffering right now), knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Rom. 5:1-4)

So, here the good news. Whatever wilderness we are in, whatever pandemic, God will meet us there. God will go out of the way to make sure we know just how much God loves us. God will reach in and provide ways for us to know our purpose. God will provide what we need: words, strength, directions, fulfillment, rescue, hope... dare I even say toilet paper, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, tests, and vaccines.

Casting Crowns wrote a song "Come to the Well." We will close with these words.

Leave it all behind,
I have what you need, But you keep on searchin,
I've done all the work, But you keep on workin,
When you're runnin on empty, And you can't find the remedy,
Just come to the well.

You can spend your whole life, Chasin what's missing,
But that empty inside, It just ain't gonna listen.
When nothing can satisfy, And the world leaves you high and dry,
Just come to the well

CHORUS:

And all who thirst will thirst no more, And all who search will find what their souls long for,
The world will try, but it can never fill,
So leave it all behind, and come to the well

So bring me your heart No matter how broken,

Just come as you are, When your last prayer is spoken,
Just rest in my arms a while, You'll feel the change my child,
When you come to the well

Leave it all behind
The world will try, but it can never fill
Leave it all behind

And now that you're full, Of love beyond measure,
Your joy's gonna flow, Like a stream in the desert,
Soon all the world will see, living water is found in me,
Cuz you've come to the well

CHORUS:

And all who thirst will thirst no more, And all who search will find what their souls long for,
The world will try, but it can never fill,
So leave it all behind, and come to the well.

Let all God's people say... Amen.