

John 4:5-42

(version: NRSV)

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."

¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"

¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.

⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

As one of my colleagues wrote: What a long year this week has been! There has been so much tumult, so much stress.

I started off this week concerned but calm, paying attention to this virus that is now spreading throughout the whole world, but wanting to confront it with a sense of even-handedness. I spent time figuring out how to do social distancing while still being in the same physical space with others. And then, the more I found out about how this virus was progressing, and the more we all realized our lives were about to change whether we wanted them to or not, I began to realize that we hadn't been doing nearly enough. And now, after panic-buying (which for us, involved cat food, cereal, ice cream, Dots, Crows, Sour Patch Kids, paneer, feta, olives, and hummus – because we

were already ok on toilet paper), our whole family is hunkered down and ready to ride this thing out... at least for the next few weeks.

Our identities are all wrapped up in one another, which is perhaps one of the reasons why social distancing is so difficult, no matter how good it is, no matter how much sense it makes. We are defined in many ways by the relationships we have with our friends and family; and so to suddenly be alone, to suddenly be cut off from others, is to cut out a part of our own selves. Or, in my family's case: to suddenly be stuck in our house (or at least on our property) with two rambunctious, inquisitive, cuddly, loving children, no matter how much light and life and love they bring to our lives, is to feel like I'm losing the part of myself that is able to get absolutely anything done in a reasonably timely way. It's a bit like learning what it might be like to be stuck on a spaceship with just these three other people (and two cats, who aren't always friends).

When have we ever seen a time like this? The last comparable outbreak happened more than a century ago, and other crises just don't seem to compare. Normally, in times of crisis, we can come together; and yet, now, we cannot. Similarly, the woman at the well, whose name we do not even know, was in a crisis, and yet kept her distance from her community and couldn't bring herself to reach out to anyone but a stranger. The people who knew her best, for whatever reason, were not people she wanted to share her struggles with.

The Samaritan woman at the well had distanced herself. She had a string of terrible luck: five husbands. Often, she is portrayed as someone who was unfaithful; but remember, the power to marry and divorce lay with men. So at the very least, she was a victim of five unscrupulous men who had cast her off; or perhaps five husbands had died. Any way you look at it, her life had been tragic.

So she went to the well at noon, the hottest part of the day. I don't know if you've ever carried a jug of water, but it's heavy and hard work. Normally, the women would have gone to the well in the early morning, before the heat set in; so this woman was taking pains to make sure she didn't have to hang out with them.

So, when this woman decided to talk to Jesus, there was no one else there; no one was there to see her talk to this random man she definitely wasn't supposed to have a conversation with! How scandalous!

Here in this story, Jesus does something incredibly important: He reveals that he is the Messiah. Ego eimi, he says – recalling the very same words that were spoken by God to Moses. When Nicodemus sought him out, when his disciples asked him, Jesus did not reveal this level of his identity; perhaps it is only in the company of an outsider – a woman, even! – that this truth can be revealed. And by telling her who he is, he helps her to see who she is.

Philip Yancey writes: “Grace, like water, flows downward... No matter how low we sink, grace flows to that lowest part.”

No matter how low we are feeling, no matter how separate and lonely, Jesus knows who we are and names us. Christ's living water is for us not just in times of joy, but in times of grief, uncertainty, doubt, anger, and sadness. Jesus knows not only who we are, but what we've been through, and what we're going through. Jesus has not forgotten us, and he reminds us that God's grace extends, like water, into every crack and crevice of our lives, bringing with it new and abundant life.

Where do you see yourself in this story?

Where do you see God in this story?

How does this story show you how God is working in your life?