WEEK #2  
Bible Study

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

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 worshipped 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 worshippers 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.
Key Verse

John 4:24 (NRSV) “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Opening Prayer

O God of love and grace, we confess that often we hold ourselves apart from those who might challenge us. Help us to recognize that Jesus is always found with those who we have made other.

Overview

In this story, Jesus has stopped to rest by a well in Samaria, a place generally avoided by Jews because of a long-standing enmity between Jews and Samaritans. While his disciples are in the city to buy food, a Samaritan woman comes to the well, and Jesus asks her for a drink. She is surprised that he, a Jew, would speak to her, a woman and a Samaritan. In their conversation, Jesus offers the woman living water. Misunderstanding what he is offering, she asks to have this living water so that she never need be thirsty again or come to the well to draw water. Jesus then asks her to call her husband, and she states that she has no husband. In fact, Jesus tells her, she has had five husbands, and the man she is with now is not her husband. She has told the truth! She wonders if he is a prophet, and she is amazed by him. At the end of their conversation, Jesus tells her that he is the Christ. When his disciples return, they are astonished that he is talking to a woman and Samaritan, but they say nothing to him. She returns to her city and tells everyone about her conversation with Jesus, and the people leave the city to go to him.

Reflection

As I approached this text to consider it for an anti-racism bible study, I was thinking of outsiders and insiders. In my own narrative, before I reread the text and began to study it, Jesus was, of course, the insider showing compassion and mercy to a woman who was, for Jews, the ultimate outsider—a woman and a Samaritan. She who had had five husbands and was with a man who was not now her husband. She who was coming to the well at noon, when most women would have come early in the day to avoid the heat. Was she avoiding the other women? Was she just a late sleeper? The text doesn’t really say, but at first glance she seems like an outsider among outsiders. There is still much to explore for this more common reading of the text. But as I read the text through an anti-racism lens, I began to wonder and think about the text differently.

In this account, Jesus is in (or near) her city. For her, Jesus is the outsider. Chapter 4, verse 4 says that “he had to go through Samaria.” Normally, if Jews had to travel, they would scrupulously avoid Samaria, because they believed Samaritans to be unclean. Samaritans didn’t practice faith correctly, didn’t worship in the right place, didn’t read the Torah the same way. There was a tremendous amount of animosity between Jews and Samaritans. And yet Jesus had to go through Samaria. Was his encounter part of that imperative?

Here they are, facing one another at a communal well. They are not, by accepted norms, even speak to each other, but Jesus offers her an invitation to engage in a conversation. She is surprised, but accepts his invitation. Barriers that she had always believed in, encountered, assumed, lived by, begin to crumble as Jesus tells her “everything I have ever done.” After the encounter, she goes back to her city, and whether or not she is an outsider,
whether or not it is risky for her to share this experience, she does, and tells her community to come and see him. And they do, crumbling those barriers even further.

When we “other” another group we assume (without thinking about it very much) that they are so different we will never be able to speak with them about anything important, learn anything from them that is significant. I think of this Samaritan woman as representing a lot of white people who assume that the differences between people of different racial experience are so complete that there is no way to learn from someone who is black, Latinx, Native American, or some other “other”. The assumption is often, I believe, unexamined, just the “way things are.” Jesus steps into that narrative and reminds us that these differences aren’t real. We made them. He will tear them down.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How can you find the presence of Jesus in your encounters with people who are different from you?
2. Racial tension is centuries old in this country, just as tension between Jews and Samaritans was centuries old in Israel. What does Jesus teach us about these divisions and how we should repent of our racism?
3. How can you share experiences you have had with people who are different from you in a way that will encourage the people in your own communities to “come and see” and work with Jesus to break down barriers?
4. How are some of the current challenges in racial relationships like the divisions between the Jews and the Samaritans?
5. How can we be like Jesus, and engage lovingly with people who we have been taught we should avoid or be afraid of?
6. What does Jesus mean when he tells us that God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in “spirit and truth?”
7. If worship is also found in our actions and behaviors, how can worship lead us to work on racial reconciliation and justice?

**Sending Forth**

God of love, wisdom, power and might,
Guide us, we pray:
as we encounter the stranger,
as we encounter those considered lesser than.
Help us to represent you as we assist with a helping hand.
In your name we pray
Amen.

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