

Encountering Jesus

At the Well

March 12, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: **John 4:4-29** *But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 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.) 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. "The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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." 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. Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."*

The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and

the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. "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."

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

Commentary: The well was where everyone gathered in the morning and evening for water and to catch up on news and community 'happenings.' This Samaritan woman with an unconventional and complicated relationship history had no doubt long been a favorite subject of such gossip. So to avoid the glare of a judgmental community, she likely came to the well only when everyone else was home.

In the past, many commentators have assumed the worst of this woman, given her extensive marital past. But this is not necessarily proof of a licentious life. She could have been trapped in the custom of *levirate* marriage (see Tamar in Genesis 38) and the last male in the family line had refused to marry her. Or, in that patriarchal culture, a husband could initiate divorce for any number of reasons while women could not. And so without means of self-support outside of marriage, this woman could have felt forced into attachments that were far from ideal or sustainable. At any rate, Jesus never accuses her of sin even as he reveals his awareness of her marital history.

But long before any of that becomes evident in this story, this woman first has to overcome her shock at meeting a Jewish man at the well at Noon, given the time of day and the long-standing animus between Jews and Samaritans. But to her great surprise, this Jewish man asks *her* for some water. Jesus was indeed breaking with convention to engage this woman, which is why the disciples will shortly be so scandalized to witness this. But Jesus not only speaks with this woman, he speaks words of life to her. He uses the well as an occasion to introduce the memorable image of living water—a new spring of water that could refresh her parched soul eternally. When the woman expresses interest in ‘living water’, Jesus brings up a sensitive, deeply personal subject – her marital life. He indicates complete awareness of her troubled past not to judge or condemn her, but to offer her God’s love at the place of her life where she likely felt most shame and vulnerability. He wanted her to experience the life-giving refreshment of the Holy Spirit – living water - to specifically address an eternal thirst that could never be addressed in temporal ways.

Eventually she catches on to what Jesus is saying. Unlike Nicodemus in the previous chapter of John’s gospel, we know how she responded – she became the first person to proclaim the Good News about Jesus in her village!

-Adapted from commentary by Scott Hoezee
(<https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2020-03-09/john-45-42-2/>)

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Why do you think Jesus chose to travel through Samaria when most self-respecting Jews would go to great trouble to avoid this territory?
2. Jesus breaks with convention to talk with this Samaritan woman. What does this say about Jesus and his desire to reach out to everyone?
3. When the woman expresses interest in “living water,” Jesus brings up the subject of her marriage. Why do you think he does this?
4. When Jesus reveals specific knowledge about her difficult past, she acknowledges that he is a ‘prophet.’ She then changes the subject to discuss Samaritan-Jewish theological differences. Why do you think it is easier to wrangle about theology than to get personal about our heart-felt struggles?

5. Jesus then redirects her to his main point, which is not about condemning or judging, but about his offer of "living water" - God's love poured into her parched heart through the Holy Spirit (Cf. Romans 5:5). How do you think she is changed by his offer of a "spirit and truth" worship connection with God?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: "*Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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."* (John 4:13-14).