

3rd Sunday Lent A (John 4:5-42)

Have you ever taken a close look at the kind of people Jesus chose to hang out with, the kind of people he was comfortable with? The twelve apostles, ordinary people, tax collectors, political zealots, sons of thunder who were enormously ambitious, ordinary fishermen, and then the woman taken in adultery, guilty perhaps, but used and abused by male exploiters, the shepherds, and prostitutes, and other sinners, the ones who shared table fellowship with Jesus. The Samaritan woman in today's Gospel seems to fit right in with this company. She had had five husbands and was currently cohabiting with another man. The Samaritans shared a mutual hatred with the Jews. No wonder that the apostles when they returned to the well to find Jesus conversing with this woman were shocked and scandalized. No Jewish man with a good reputation would talk alone with a woman, much less a hated Samaritan! But Jesus recognized her thirst for more than water from the well.

This encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well could serve as a metaphor for our own journey of faith. What happens when one truly encounters Jesus, or is encountered by him? The woman challenges, probes, questions, and finally yields to the presence of the Holy One, the One who can provide the water of life which she so desperately desires. That which she thought she knew is turned upside down. Her conversion in this short episode meant coming to know and accept Jesus, the Messiah, deeply and totally, for she was touched and transformed by this encounter.

In my special ministry with divorced people, some would consider this nameless woman the patron saint of divorced people. She encounters Jesus and is healed and transformed. She begins to learn what it means to worship in Spirit and Truth. The Spirit of God purifies the sinner who believes. Truth purifies, for the purification lies in authentic love, a love that endures and goes far beyond what could possibly be expected. The truth is found in the Father's love, which heals and purifies and gives value and unconditional love.

The Samaritan woman was so overwhelmed by this encounter with Jesus and the promise of the living water of God's love, that she was moved and sent by Jesus to share her experience with her townsfolk. And they believed on the strength of this woman's proclamation of the good news, a Samaritan, divorced, sinful apostle to the despised Samaritans.

She had been gifted by Jesus, and he encouraged her to share her giftedness, her new experience of God's living water and her experience of a new kind of affirming love. Jesus calls each one of us to share our experience of Jesus and his affirming love through our actions and words with those who are in need of hope and affirmation, of support and compassion. That is the call of Jesus to our parish community. And with grateful hearts we celebrate the Eucharist of Jesus.

Al Grosskopf, S.J.