

March 12, 2023 [Jn. 4: 5-42](#) & Ex. 17: 3-7

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Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [The Revelation of Freedom](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Listening to Different Voices](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#) 3/19/17

[Woman at the Well](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

From the wedding at Cana, to the cleansing of the temple, we face the first rumblings of trouble at the end of chapter two. Nicodemus comes under the cover of night to inquire, and John defuses the anxiety of his disciples by turning them toward Jesus in chapter three. This begins to turn up the heat, and now we find Jesus retreating from Jerusalem to Galilee to turn down the heat. He must have been in a hurry, as he went through Samaria, since Jews really hated to incur the pollution of going through that despised territory of "heretics". (See below) On the way he becomes thirsty and hungry, so the quest for water and food delay the progress a bit. This gives God the chance to reveal truth to those there who were looking for the truth.

John 4:5-42

5 So he came to a town in **Samaria** called **Sychar**, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's **well** was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the **well**. It was **about the sixth hour**. 7 When a **Samaritan woman** came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "**Will you give me a drink?**" 8 (His

disciples had gone into the town to buy **food**.) 9 The **Samaritan woman** said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a **Samaritan woman**. How can you ask me for a **drink?**" (For Jews do not associate with **Samaritans**.) 10 Jesus answered her, "**If you knew the gift of God** and who it is that asks you for a **drink**, you would have asked him and he would have given you **living water**." 11 Sir," the **woman** said, "you have **nothing to draw with** and the **well is deep**. Where can you get this **living water**? 12 **Are you greater** than our father Jacob, who gave us the **well** and **drank** from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who **drinks this water** will be **thirsty** again, 14 but whoever **drinks the water** I give him will never **thirst**. Indeed, the **water** I give him will become in him a spring of **water welling up to eternal life**." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this **water** so that I won't get **thirsty** and have to keep coming here to draw **water**." 16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." 17 I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You **are right when you say** you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite **true**." 19 Sir," the **woman** said, "I can see that you are a **prophet**. 20 Our fathers **worshiped** on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must **worship** is in **Jerusalem**." 21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, **woman**, a time is coming when you will **worship** the Father neither on this mountain nor in **Jerusalem**. 22 You **Samaritans worship** what you do not know; we **worship** what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the **true worshipers** will **worship** the Father in **spirit** and **truth**, for they are the kind of **worshipers** the Father seeks. 24 God is **spirit**, and his **worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth**."

25 The woman said, "I know that **Messiah**" (called **Christ**) "is coming. When he comes, he will **explain everything** to us." 26 Then Jesus declared, "**I** who speak to you **am he**." 27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a **woman**. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" 28 Then, leaving her **water jar**, the **woman** went back to the town and said to the people, 29 **Come, see** a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the **Christ?**" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him. 31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "**Rabbi**, eat something." 32 But he said to them, "I have **food** to eat that you know nothing about." 33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him **food?**" 34 My **food**," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, **open your eyes** and look at the fields! They are ripe for **harvest**. 36 Even now the reaper draws his **wages**, even now he **harvests** the crop for **eternal life**, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another **reaps**' is **true**. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have **reaped the benefits** of their labor." 39 Many of the **Samaritans** from that town believed in him because of the **woman's** testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when the **Samaritans** came to him, they **urged him to stay with them**, and he **stayed two days**. 41 And because of his **words** many more became **believers**. 42 They said to the **woman**, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have **heard for ourselves**, and we know that this man really is the **Savior** of the world."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus asked the woman for something he needed, and in doing so he gave her what she needed most. What is Jesus asking of you, that when you give it to him, you might receive something you need the most?

PRAYER: Friend Jesus, each time I come to the well of your words, I affirm my need for the living water you promised the woman of our reading today. This woman must have first felt your acceptance or she would not have been free to respond the way she did. Her freedom to receive your love had the effect of freeing many more of her people. Help me to fully accept this same freedom and empower me to be a witness to that love for others? Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

SAMARIA / SAMARITANS / WOMAN: A pious Jew would take a long detour around Samaria on the way to or from Jerusalem. Jesus should not have been in Samaria, and he should not talk to a woman, let alone a Samaritan woman. Both made him ritually impure.

What does this tell you about Jesus' attitude towards purity? Samaritans and women?

JEW / JEWS / JERUSALEM / MOUNTAIN: The division over where God was to be worshipped was deeper than any well. It represented tangibly the struggle over the truth about God between Jews and Samaritans.

What and where are such divisions today?

(Mt. Gerizim: See Samaria below)



WELL / WELLING UP / LIVING WATER / DEEP: Like the woman, we come to the well looking for life sustaining water. We also find that the source of that water lies down deep within.

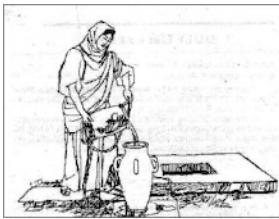
Does your spiritual search go deep enough to obtain just water, or does it draw up "living water"?

ABOUT THE SIXTH HOUR: This is noon, the hottest time of the day. This woman probably comes then so that she doesn't have to face the scorn of other women when they come in the cool of the morning.

What does this tell you about the woman? About Jesus?

WILL YOU GIVE ME A DRINK / ARE YOU GREATER / EXPLAIN EVERYTHING: First Jesus asks a question, then the woman. Finally, everything is explained. In the process, the woman finds herself, and then is able to explain to others who Jesus really is.

How does your spiritual search enable you to find yourself, so that you can explain what you have found to others?



FOOD / WORDS: There are no stones/bread temptations in John's gospel. But we find the same truth that God's word is his source of nourishment in Jesus' dialogue with the disciples in this portion of the gospel.

Is there any 'bread/food' in these words for you today?

IF YOU KNEW THE GIFT OF GOD / TRUTH / TRUE / SPIRIT: God's gift is truth. This truth comes to us by way of the Spirit. Jesus challenges the woman to go deeper into her own 'well' to find her truth.

Do you, like the woman, prefer to stay with the literal meaning of things in order to avoid the deeper truth and its challenges? Have you experienced Jesus' persistence in calling you to do deeper? How?

NOTHING TO DRAW WITH: The woman resists Jesus' challenge with a challenge of her own.

How do you say "yes, but" to God when God challenges you?

THIRSTY: All living things get thirsty, and both Jesus and the woman were thirsty. A well is a gift of God to sustain life. Jesus is the 'well' that brings eternal life.

Are you shielded by your lifestyle from ever becoming thirsty? What brings you the water of eternal life? Are the gospels a 'well' for you?

ETERNAL LIFE / HARVEST / REAPS / REAPED / BENEFITS: Others have planted the seeds that have produced faith in your life. You are reaping the harvest/benefits of their labor of love.

Are you now planting for the next generation's harvest of faith? How? Where? When?

SIR / PROPHET / MESSIAH / CHRIST / I AM HE / RABBI / SAVIOR: Notice the progression in the revelation of who Jesus, is by the different names he is called in this story.

Can you see how each title lowers us deeper into God's well of truth?

WORSHIP / WORSHIPPED / BELIEVERS: The woman and her people already worship God in the only way they know. Their present beliefs keep them from drawing from Jesus' depths.

Do you have any beliefs that keep you from being able to go deep enough to believe Jesus' revelations? If so, what ways are you using to lengthen the rope of your bucket?

YOU ARE RIGHT WHEN YOU SAY: Jesus affirms the woman's confession of truth, which then opens her to the deepest truth.

Is there any confession of truth that you need to come to, so that you can open yourself to a still deeper understanding of God's love for you?

COME, SEE / OPEN YOUR EYES / HEARD FOR OURSELVES: The woman, the disciples, and the townspeople, have all seen and heard enough to enable them to believe for themselves.

How has this time with these questions helped you to see and hear, so that you also can come to a deeper faith?

URGED HIM TO STAY WITH THEM / STAYED TWO DAYS: Samaritans despised Jews, especially Jews on their way to or from the hated Jerusalem. It was often dangerous to even try such a trip. But they also believed that the Messiah would be the one who would reveal all truth.

Do you think this woman had to wait till noon to draw water again? Do you think the disciples would have a problem with talking to a woman from now on? (See Acts 8:5-8) What is John telling us by giving us this wonder filled story of faith?

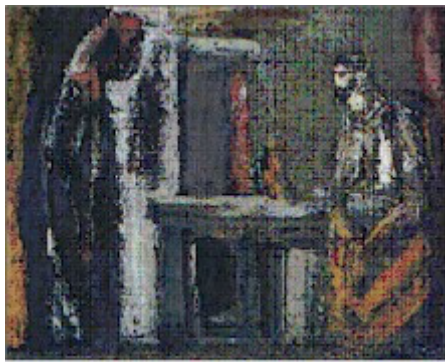
PARALLEL TEXTS: Jn. 4:5 // Gn. 33:18; Jn. 4:9 // Sir. 50:25f; Mt. 10:5; Jn. 4:14 // Jn. 6:35; 7:37f; Jn. 4:22 // 2 Kgs. 17: 27; Jn. 4:26 // Jn. 9:37; Jn. 4:34 // Jn. 6:38; 17:4; Jn. 4:35 // Mt. 9:37f; Lk. 10:2; Jn. 4:36 // Ps. 126:5f;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Ex. 17:3-7; [Ps. 95: 1-2, 6-9](#); Rom. 5:1-2, 5-8; Jn. 4:5-42; Revised Common Lectionary: Ex. 17:1-7; [Ps. 95](#); Rom. 5:1-11; Jn. 4:5-42;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

In the Decalogue (10th commandment) of the Samaritan Pentateuch we find:

“There is one God; Moses was his prophet; there will be a Day of Judgment; and Mt. Gerizim is the place appointed by God for sacrifice.”



Christ and the Samaritan Woman by Mario Sironi (Sassari 1885-Milan 1961) This picture which is a gift to the Vatican collection by Cardinal Alberto di Jorio. The artist emphasizes the light and almost obliterates the pictorial image in order to convey the gist of the conversation and the intimacy of the meeting. Sironi's particular interpretation of the story was an outgrowth of that natural religious bent that, in the years following World War II, succeeded in attenuating his dramatic vision.

SAMARIA: the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, was located on a 300 foot high hill, 42 miles north of Jerusalem between Judea and Galilee, with a mixed people. Jews held Samaritans in contempt as religious apostates, because they only accepted the first five books of the bible. They were colonists whom the king of Assyria sent to inhabit the Land of Israel after the captivity, and hence were despised by the Jews. In the time of Zerubbabel they sought to form an alliance with the returned captives and to unite with them in building the temple, but were rejected. Ezr.4:2, 3. They had a temple on Mt. Gerizim (Jn.4:20), which was burned down by the Jews in 128 BCE.. Later on, Philip did a successful work

among them, Acts 8:5-8. Some 350 Samaritans live today in Nablus.

Excavators have uncovered the foundations of Omri's palace, and the larger foundations and ruins of the palace of Ahab on the summit of the hill of Samaria. Just inside the north wall of the palace they found several thousand fragments of ivory, "many of which had been ruined by fire. Some thirty or forty of the ivories were recovered in an excellent state of preservation. On some were portrayed the lotus, lions, sphinxes, and the gods Isis and Horus, indicating the strong influences of Egypt on the Israel of this time.

If God is incarnate in ordinary life then we should seek God, first of all, within ordinary life. Too often, even though we know this theoretically, practically we still look for God in the extraordinary. ...Christian spirituality is not as much about admiring God, or even trying to imitate God, as it is about undergoing God and participating, through taking part in the ordinary give and take of relationships, in the flow of God's life. The God who became flesh in order to be experienced by the ordinary senses, still has flesh and is primarily to be experienced through the ordinary senses

Rolheiser, Ronald. [The Holy Longing](#). NY. Doubleday. 1999. Pages 100-101.

The search for truth requires an openness to dialogue with those whose truth seems at first to be other than ours, with those who are others, whose beliefs may even appear strange, an evangelical openness that we find in Jesus of Nazareth who recognized the presence and action of God in the other, and from whom he learned (**John 4:1-15**). [Dialogue and Truth by Donald J. Goergen, O.P](#)

Open dialog with the disillusioned and the alienated would be a powerful teacher if we had the courage to undertake it in the spirit with which Jesus spoke and listened to the woman at the well at Sychar (Jn. 5-42).

Heaps, John. [A Love That Dares to Question: A Bishop Challenges His Church](#). Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans Pub. Col. 1998. Pg. 60.

As Rainer Maria Rilke might later describe it, “Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now.” (Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet, 1934)

I don't think the important thing is to be certain about answers nearly as much as being serious about the questions. When we hold spiritual questions, we meet and reckon with our contradictions, with our own dilemmas; and we invariably arrive at a turning point where we either evade God or meet God. Mere answers close down the necessary struggle too quickly, too glibly, and too easily. When

we hang on the horns of dilemmas with Christ—between perfect consistency and necessary contradictions—we find ourselves in the unique place I call “[liminal space](#).” Reality has a cruciform shape to it then—and we are taught best at the intersection of order and disorder, where God alone can make sense out of the situation and we must surrender. All real transformation of persons takes place when we’re inside of such [liminal](#) space—with plenty of questions that are open to God and grace and growth. Richard Rohr

"In the word question, there is a beautiful word - quest. I love that word. We are all partners in a quest. The essential questions have no answers. You are my question, and I am yours - and then there is dialogue. The moment we have answers, there is no dialogue. Questions unite people. Answers divide them." —Elie Wiesel, Tanner Lecture on Human Values at Snow College, 22 May 2006

"Suppose we were able to share meanings freely without a compulsive urge to impose our view or to conform to those of others and without distortion and self-deception. Would this not constitute a real revolution in culture?" —David Bohm, *Changing Consciousness*

In chapter 7 of Sr. Halpin’s book [Leading Prayer: Plain and Simple](#), we find a prayer session dealing with water. Although it is written to be used with children, with a few modifications it could be useful for all ages.

Halpin, Marlene, Dominican. [Leading Prayer: Plain and Simple](#). Dubuque, IA. Brown Pub. 1990. Page

If one has the answers to all the questions- that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. Pope Francis

Confronted with so much uncertainty and irrationality, how can we feel hopeful about the future? And this degree of uncertainty is affecting us personally. It’s changing how we act and feel. I notice this in myself and others. We’re more cynical, impatient, fearful, angry, defensive, anxious; more likely to hurt those we love. Certainly this is not what any of us wants. How can we become people we respect, people who are generous, loving, curious, open, energetic? How can we ensure that at the end of our lives, we’ll feel that we have done meaningful work, created something that endured, helped other people, raised healthy children? What can we do now to restore hope to the future? Margaret Wheatley

We would prefer clear and easy answers, but questions hold the greatest potential for opening us to transformation. Richard Rohr

We spend a lot of time and energy raising questions. Is it worth it? It is always good to ask ourselves why we raise a question. Do we want to get useful information? Do we want to show that someone else is wrong? Do we want to conquer knowledge? Do we want to grow in wisdom? Do we want to find a way to sanctity? When we ponder these questions before asking our questions, we may discover that we need less time and energy for our questions. Perhaps we already have the information. Perhaps we don't need to show that someone is wrong. For many questions we may learn that we already have the answers, at least if we listen carefully to our own hearts. Henri Nouwen

"Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day." Rainer Maria Rilke Letters to a Young Poet:

Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows. Alfred North Whitehead

Inhibitions imposed from without rarely succeed, but when they are self-imposed, they have a decidedly salutary effect. Mohandas Gandhi.-My Experiments With Truth

(The five husbands are also understood as five gods Samaritans have worshipped in the past.)

SUGGESTED READINGS

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 71-78. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2008. Pgs.46-50. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2011. Pgs. 65-68. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Wells, Abbe Jane. The Gospel According to Abbe Jane Wells. Thomas More Press, Chicago. 1985. **I WONDER**: Page 93.

Wiederkehr, Macrina, OSB. [Seasons of Your Heart](#). Silver Burdett Co, Morristown, NJ. 1979. **ON BEING A WELL**: Pages 142-144.