

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA
 ✘ Third Sunday in Lent-A, 27. March, A.D. 2011 ✘

John 4:5-42 5So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7A 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.) 9The 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.) 10Jesus 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. 11The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" 12Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14but 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." 15The 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." 16Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem. 21Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23But 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. 24God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." 27Just 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?" 28Then 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?" 30They left the city and were on their way to him. 31Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" 34Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 35Do 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. 36The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." 39Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." 40So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41And many more believed because of his word. 42They 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.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to Whom be the glory now and forever. Amen. [Gal. 1:3-5]

Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem, and we are going with him this Lent.

In today's Gospel we have a short story -- just 38 vv. long.

John the Apostle wrote like that -- he likes to tell stories.

(Wait till you hear next Sunday's story from John.)

This one is about water, relationships and worship.

We handle water fairly well -- we've had a lot of it lately -- but as a people we're not as good at relationships or at worship as we ought to be.

So let's first remember one basic thing about relationships:

We like people who like us. And, we like people who are like us.

Oh yes, some say that opposites attract, and that's true in some cases, but mostly, (2 we like people who are like us.

In fact we might even say that we worship people who are like us, where "worship" means -- as in its original form, "woerth-scipe" -- to reverence or to honor what is of worth in someone we like.

So then we could say: "Like worships like," right? "Like worships like."

And that's where that little refrain in your service folder comes in.

[I'm indebted to Dr. Robert Bertram for this refrain.]

I'll tell you when I want you to say that with me -- I'll say "**Refrain.**" OK?

OK. Water, relationships, worship.

Let's complicate those a bit more.

Let's look at them three ways: ex-ternally, in-ternally and e-ternally.

Or we might say, on the outside, the inside, and the far side, or the far, far away side, or the everlasting side.

Part I. What if We Came for Water and We Found a dry well?

Point A. External Problem: Our Needs and Wants in Life

At first, the woman at the well -- let's call her "well-woman" -- was suspicious of this stranger at her well.

Her problem was accepting Jesus for who he really was -- she was suspicious.

Why would a Jew like Jesus talk to a Samaritan unless it be that he, a man, had designs on her as a woman? (Remember, she'd had how many husbands, & now a live-in-man? she'd had experience with men.)

And he asks her for a drink. Yeah, sure. Sounds like a pick up line to me.

She wonders what he really wants.

In short, her problem is that he, just externally, on the outside, -- even though he looked like her and her kind -- she couldn't be sure of what he wanted.

So, going for water in this story first of all symbolizes our needs & wants in life.

Clearly, well-woman and the disciples, as is true for all of us, are preoccupied with the needs of the body -- water, food, rest, and safety.

Even Jesus is "**tired out**" (v. 6) as he asks well-woman for water.

We in our day seem almost obsessed with what to eat and what not to eat, what prescription drug to use and not to use, how to remain sexually active, how to live longer, etc.

Can you imagine carrying water for miles up the side of a mountain? I learned from Lutheran World Relief just last week that the women of the remote East Sumba region of Indonesia face a two hour walk every day, up and down mountainous terrain, to get water.

Lutheran World Relief is asking for donations to dig wells.

But we, we just worry about the purity of our water.

In short, we seem to be totally absorbed by our own needs and wants of the body.

(Refrain)

P: Like worships like.

C: But who can be like God?

P: What if God became like us?

C: Then we could be like God.

P: Then we could worship God.

Point B. Internal Problem: Disbelief in the Heart

Internally, on the inside, well-woman and the disciples had a deeper problem.

When Jesus told her of his mysterious "**living water**," and when he told his disciples he had "**food**" they knew nothing about, she and they had trouble believing him.

We could say they had heart problems -- couldn't trust Jesus.

Even when well-woman said, "**Sir, give me this water**," she was believing in the wrong water.

She envisioned running water in her kitchen, in her bathroom. (3)
All she could think about was not having "**to keep coming here to draw water.**" (15)
That's still a kind of unbelief.

And who of us doesn't have such misplaced trust in things ?
Trouble is, we rarely take time to really look within.

If we did we might become aware of a **spiritual** thirst and hunger waiting to be satisfied.

In his Sermon on the Mount, which we just studied at length during Epiphany, we are told to seek first God's Kingdom and righteousness, but do we?

We still put major trust in our things. Like can only appreciate like. **(Refrain)**

P: Like worships like.

C: But who can be like God?

P: What if God became like us?

C: Then we could be like God.

P: Then we could worship God.

Point C. Eternal Problem: Separated in the Hereafter

Now we're ready to think eternally, about the far side, or the hereafter.

Well-woman's problem looks way different when Jesus shows that he knows all about her sordid life with men.

She panics, suddenly realizing she is up against, she guesses, "a prophet."

Who else could see through her shameful past with such x-ray vision?

"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" (v. 29) Did that exposure of her whole life -- did that perhaps remind her of her fear of death?

At the very least, she knows now that **eternal** things are up for discussion, the far, far side of life, the hereafter.

So she scrambles to come up with a religious argument -- she has to save face.

She brings up the sacred mountain they're standing on, even though she admits it may not be as worthy a place for worship as the Jews' holy city.

Jesus said, **22You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,....**

Well, that's rather blunt -- it's not about places. **"You worship what you do not know..."**, Jesus said., and we want to be true worshippers don't we?

What a tragedy -- to be alive, walking, talking, thinking, feeling, going through all the motions and not knowing or loving or worshipping the true and living God.

True worship is about **"...spirit and truth..."** One of our greatest needs is to know the truth about our distance from the living God without Jesus.

That distance could become an everlasting distance when we cross over to the far side. **(Refrain)**

P: Like worships like.

C: But who can be like God?

P: What if God became like us?

C: Then we could be like God.

P: Then we could worship God.

Now notice: on the outside she was first suspicious.

On the inside she was trusting the wrong things.

And as for being ready for the far side -- she was not! Her well was dry!

Part II. What If, Instead of a Dry Well, She and We Had Living Water

Point A. The Eternal Solution: Messiah Is Here!

When the woman says to Jesus that she knows, **"Messiah is coming (who) will proclaim all things to us"** (v. 25), Jesus tells her what he has not told another soul before, **"I am he, the one who is speaking to you"** (v. 26).

God who is unlike us, the *"totaliter aliter,"* the Totally Other, becomes one of us. (4

Just then the disciples return, and the woman, speechless at what she had just heard, and now really scared, drops everything and runs back to town.

But, as she hurries, perhaps now she can begin to connect the dots.

Jesus had said, **"Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."** (v. 14).

There it is, **"...eternal life"** -- she and we are dealing with eternity with this Messiah.

Perhaps now we are ready to hear the second truth.

The first truth, our distance from God, is solved by God himself!

The second truth is that he is offering an eternal solution to all our problems and woes.

"...the water that I will give...a spring of water..." is the message of the cross.

There on the cross he cried out in agony, **"I thirst."**

There on the cross he was drained of his life blood for all humanity.

There he suffered the unimaginable: total separation from his eternal Father.

He said to the disciples, **"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work," (v.34)** and so he did his Father's will.

It meant that he suffered the loss of everything - - - - for you and me.

The truth about us, our distance from God, can now be compared with Messiah's truth from the cross.

"It is finished," he said, then, **"he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."** (Jn.19:30)

How much more like us could the unlike God possibly be! **(Refrain)**

P: Like worships like.

C: But who can be like God?

P: What if God became like us?

C: Then we could be like God.

P: Then we could worship God.

Point B. Internal Solution: God and We Now Alike

That is the e-ternal solution to our eternal problem -- now we in-ternalize it as our own bybelieving it.

That is what happened with the villagers of Sychar.

At first they believed in Jesus merely **"because of the woman's testimony."** (v. 39)

But soon the believers of Sychar advanced to a much more solid foundation:

"Many more believed because of [Jesus'] word." (v. 41)

Having become believers in him, they, too, are able to see that the unlike God has become like us, in Jesus Christ. And like believes like. **(Refrain)**

P: Like worships like.

C: But who can be like God?

P: What if God became like us?

C: Then we could be like God.

P: Then we could worship God.

Point C. External Solution: Signs of Life

Notice how at Sychar the people's faith breaks out in confession.

You see, there is no internal solution without an external one.

What that means is that the eternal life of Jesus that gushes up within us meets our every need, transforms our whole existence.

For one thing, our worship life becomes better as the liturgy becomes a deeper encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ.

For another thing, the Holy Spirit empowers us to join him in **"harvesting"** (v. 27) and in **"the gathering of fruit for eternal life"** (v. 36).

We do this by our lively witness of the good news to those who do not yet know that in Christ they have already **"passed from death to life"** (John 5:24).

For still another, our daily eating and drinking is no longer just routine because we receive our food and drink with thanksgiving to God, and we share our blessings with our neighbor, maybe even with the women of Indonesia.

In all these ways we are indeed worshipping God, the Spirit-God, **"in spirit and in truth."** (Refrain)

P: Like worships like.

C: But who can be like God?

P: What if God became like us?

C: Then we could be like God.

P: Then we could worship God.

Yes, then we could worship God in spirit and in truth.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

S.D.g.

The Rev. Dr. Donald Schedler, Ph.D., Chaplain,
Snowline Hospice, Diamond Springs, CA.

Lucida fax 10; Georgia 10