

The Son of God was baptized in the Jordan River

and then walked into the desert where he fasted for 40 days.

He was hungry. He was thirsty. He was alone.

The People of God left Egypt through the divided waters of the Red Sea
and went out into the desert.

For 40 years they lived in the wilderness,

crying to God because THEY were hungry,

THEY were thirsty, and THEY were alone.

One day they said to Moses, “Why did you even take us out of Egypt?”

“We were slaves there but at least we had food to eat
and water to drink.”

They turned on Moses and Moses cried to God for help.

God told Moses he would be waiting on him at a place called Horeb.

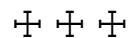
God told Moses to strike the rock at Horeb with his staff,
and when he did water flowed from the rock.

Water for the people. Water for the animals.

All the water they needed to quench their thirst and live.

At least for that day.

Moses trusted in the Lord and once again God saved the People with water.



Centuries later Jesus came to a city called Sychar.

It is not the wilderness but it IS a city outside of Judea.

A city where Jesus is the outsider, where he is viewed with suspicion.

You know how the story goes.

She offers Jesus water from the well of her ancestor Jacob.

He offers her water that Jacob's well cannot give,

life that even the rock at Horeb cannot give.

He offers her a fountain of living water that will never run dry,

a fountain of eternal life.

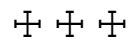
She says the one who gives that water

would have to be the Messiah they always prayed for.

And then he says to her the same word

that God said to Moses from the fires of the burning bush.

Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, I AM.



For the next 3 Sundays Jesus will talk about eternal life in 3 distinct ways.

Today he offers living water to the woman at the well.

Next Sunday he gives sight to the man who was blind since birth.

And the Sunday after that he raises his friend Lazarus from the dead.

This pattern - water, light, life -

has deep roots in the Lenten practice of the Church.

As we approach the mysteries of Holy Week and the Celebration of Easter,

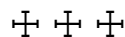
as candidates prepare for baptism

and we all prepare to renew our baptismal vows,

Jesus offers water, light, and life as signs of ETERNAL life.

Lent is a penitential season,
but even more Lent is the time to prepare our hearts
for the Paschal Mystery,
to remember that we proclaim not only
the death and resurrection of Jesus,
but that we have died and been reborn with him.

Reborn in the living water of baptism.
Proclaiming the light of Christ through word and action.
Living in the hope of Resurrection life.



We'll meet some interesting people these next 3 Sundays.
Lazarus. Mary. Martha. The blind man, and his frightened parents.
The woman at the well. I'll add Nicodemus from last Sunday.

These people have captured the imagination of Christians for centuries.
In various ways we identify with their strengths and weaknesses,
with their positions in life.
We use them as stand-ins for who we aspire to be, or not to be.

Sometimes we want to make Nicodemus a fearful man
who comes to Jesus under cover of darkness,
but other times we make him the wise leader who pushes back
against the abuse and bigotry of the Sanhedrin.

The blind man was reduced to begging in the streets by his disability.
Teachers and scholars love to debate whether we
honor or dishonor him by how we talk about blindness.

Church members love to talk about themselves as Marthas or Marys,
and then writers critique that kind of talk as reductive,
as caricatures of these female leaders in the early church.

And then there's today's starring character,
the Samaritan woman at the well who has been married five times.

Depending on when and where you were raised in the church,
you may have been taught that she was a woman of loose morals,
or a victim of patriarchal society doing what she had to do to survive,
or that she was a political metaphor for the five treaties
Samaria had with foreign powers, or more positively,
that she was the first evangelist outside of Judea -
the first evangelist to the rest of the world.

It's tempting sometimes to get caught up analyzing
who these people really were,
to be distracted by how much you identify with this one or that one,
to argue for this or that interpretation.

"I am like Martha." "I identify with Nicodemus."

"I have a disability, like the young blind man."

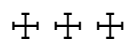
"I want to hear about women who stand up to powerful men, even Jesus."

"I want to hear about steady, faithful men

who preserve society's moral standards,

but I want ones who speak up for society's victims."

And on and on.



It's an understandable temptation. We like our saints, our exemplars.

We identify with people who are like us, who share our values,
who have known what we've known,
suffered what we've suffered, who loved like we love.

But friends, when we go down that road we make the same mistake
as the woman at the well.

Because when Jesus offers her this new life,
she holds on to the life she already knows.

She clings to her identity as a Samaritan,
holds on to HER history, to HER experiences.

“But Jacob gave us THIS well, gave us THIS water” she says to Jesus,
“Our ancestors told us to go to the MOUNTAIN to meet God.”

She clings to the life she knows because we all do that,
because our histories shape us,
our wounds and our triumphs inform our way of seeing the world.

We think we know all that our world can be, all that our life can be.

But holding on too tightly to my history, to my perspective,

holding on too tightly to our identities -
as a nice, respectable middle-aged man;
as a successful and independent woman;
as a gender non-conforming outsider;
as rich or poor, as victim or oppressor...

clinging too tightly to those identities can be a stumbling block
to accepting the new life, the transformed life,
the ETERNAL life that Jesus is offering.

And it's not as if Jesus is asking you to give up or betray
those wonderful particulars that make you who you are.
You are a beautiful, unique, and incredibly messy creation.
You are as God made you and you are beautiful to behold.

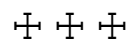
But Jesus calls you to see that your primary identity,
your deepest, truest self is not male or female, or non-binary,
not black or brown or white,
not rich or poor, not rule-follower or rule-challenger,
not prophet or teacher or parent or child.

Jesus is asking you to believe that your deepest, truest self
is simply beloved child of God,
and invites you to see him for who he truly is -
the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of God.

Do not make an idol of your wonderful particulars.
Do not make an idol of your status or your respectability
or your principles or your history.
Avoid the trap of identifying with the OLD lives
of Nicodemus or Martha or Mary or the woman at the well.

Look instead for the new life, the eternal life Jesus is offering them and us.
Seek out instead the living water, the light, the life that Jesus offers.

**“For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
Everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!”**



Your work this Lent is to cut through the distractions of daily living,
to cut through the defenses of your histories and your identities,
and to lift your eyes to the cross of Christ.

See the Son of Man lifted high on a tree.

See that the blood that flows from his pierced side
is like the saving water that came from the rock at Horeb.

See the salvation given at your baptism.

Live from that holy, transformed place.

Be the unique person you were created to be.

**“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,
but have everlasting life.”**

Amen.