



A LENTEN RETREAT: Week Three

For the next three weeks we will be listening to three of the great stories that we find in the Gospels: the woman at the well, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus. These three stories highlight what discipleship is all about. These stories invite us to reflect on where we are in our discipleship of Jesus. This part of the retreat then will invite us to go deeper into our own personal relationship with Jesus and try to discover where Jesus is inviting us in this relationship. Deepening on how honest we are with ourselves and how deeply we reflect on these stories, will determine where the retreat takes us for the next three weeks.

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well begins with Jesus, a Jew, encountering a woman who is also a Samaritan. She is a woman who is struggling with various obstacles to faith. As we identify those obstacles in her life, we are then invited to reflect on our experiences of things and people who are obstacles to faith for us.

The fact that Jesus speaks to a woman is already an obstacle. Jewish men didn't speak to women in public. To make matters worse Jews and Samaritans didn't get along with each other. Samaritans had intermarried with foreign people and the Jews felt this was an insult to their religion and the purity of their race, where Jews only married Jews. There were inequalities that she saw in their relationship from the very beginning. These inequalities or injustices were a "chip on her shoulder" before Jesus even begins to speak to her.

Jesus doesn't answer her objections, he wasn't going to change a whole world of injustices in a single encounter. But Jesus offers her living water to put the injustices into perspective.

Her response is not unexpected. Why would she want something from someone she doesn't get along with. "No thanks, I already have all I need," seems to be her response. Isn't that how people generally respond to someone offering them something new in terms of their faith in God? I don't want something new, I am happy with what I have.

The living water that Jesus offers her, she doesn't really understand. She thinks in terms of water from the well and Jesus is talking about the water of baptism and water that leads to eternal life where there is no more physical thirst. She is only interested in this water from the point of view of convenience. If she is no

"If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

longer thirsty, then she would not have to come to the well each day to get water. And isn't that often what attracts people to religion is the aspect of whether or not it is convenient.

Jesus then moves to the relationship she has with her husband. Jesus seems to know more about her than she is willing to let on. She says she doesn't have a husband and Jesus says that she in fact has had five and the man she is living with now is not her husband. Sometimes we think our past sins are what keep us from God, or from allowing God to forgive us. We need to be honest with Jesus in order that we can let go of our past and move forward into a deeper relationship with Jesus. Notice that Jesus doesn't tell her, "Go home and straighten out your life first and then come and talk to me about faith." Our relationship with Jesus is meant to help us change, not magically make things different.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES FOR THE WEEK

The Woman at the Well

John 4:5-42

The woman at the well - [reread this](#)

Psalm 6

Prayer in distress

Psalm 143

Prayer in distress

Luke 15:11-32

Prodigal Son

2Corinthians 5:16-21

God's mercy

Matthew 25:31-46

Serving Christ in others

Use one of the forms of praying with Scripture from last week's bulletin or simply read the above passages and hear God speaking to you of his love.

The woman tries to sidetrack Jesus by talking about which mountain people are supposed to worship on. Most likely she hadn't worshipped on either mountain and simply wanted to distract Jesus from delving more into her life. And yet Jesus refuses to be sidetracked. Jesus wants her to acknowledge her past and begin to heal from it. Jesus knows the pain her past has caused her and wants her to be free of that pain and hurt. Jesus wants us to come to him no matter what our past has been.

The woman again tries to sidetrack Jesus with talk about how the Messiah would come in the future and will tell us everything. Jesus again refuses to be sidetracked and says to her, "I am he," I am the Messiah that people are looking for. Jesus confronts her with the reality of faith here and now.

We might tend to judge the woman as being slow to come to faith in Jesus with all the hints he has been giving her. But we should hold off on our judgment because the disciples who have now returned to the scene, even they do not understand who Jesus is and they have been with him much longer than this woman has. The disciples do not understand about the "bread" that Jesus speaks of.

Finally, the woman goes back to the village and talks to others about what has happened at the well. And some of them come to speak with Jesus and come to believe. The woman wrestling with her own faith helped others to come to find theirs. And their coming to faith helped her to resolve the questions in her own life. She finally comes to drink of the life giving water.

This week you are invited to keep reading and re-reading this story of the woman at the well (John 4:5-42). There are a few obstacles to faith to reflect upon in your own life:

1. The woman had a "chip on her shoulder." What is the "chip" on my shoulder? What injustices or inequalities have I experienced that keep me from a deeper faith in God? Were they caused by other people, the church, or someone in my own family? How have those past injustices kept me from moving closer to God? What might I do to resolve those past hurts or to heal from them? Or is my response to those hurts, "no thanks," like the woman at the well?
2. The woman had to face the reality of her not so perfect past. Remember that Jesus doesn't turn her away, but invites her to honestly acknowledge her past and find a way to let it go and heal from it. What is there in my past that I think God can't forgive or that I am embarrassed to bring to God for healing and forgiveness? Is it something someone has done to hurt me, or is it something I have done? Maybe the sacrament of reconciliation can help me to acknowledge the past and allow God to heal it? Jesus wants to enter into this painful time with us in order that we might find the healing we long for.
3. The woman keeps trying to distract Jesus from entering deeper into her life, especially the parts she is not so proud of. What are the distractions that keep us from entering into a deeper relationship with Jesus - the busyness of our lives, the thought of how it might look if I start being more serious about my religion, or am I just scared to take the next step for fear of what it will demand of me?
4. The woman tells others about this Jesus she has encountered. Where are we giving witness to Jesus in our lives? How are we telling others about this Jesus we have encountered? Are we able to talk to others about our faith when the subject comes up?

"The woman said to him, 'I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything.'" Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one speaking with you.'"