

## March 8 message

Today's gospel reading is found only in John and it is filled with many implications for us today. Many are very familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The word "Samaritan" carries a positive connotation with it because of this story. When my family went camping when I was younger we belonged to a camper club called the Good Sam Club. Its founding was based on the parable Jesus told emphasizing how one traveler helped another. Today it has almost 3 million members and offers services and discounts to its members. Many of the RV parks you see today belong to this organization.

At the time of Jesus though, the word, "Samaritan" did not carry a positive vibe for Jewish people. The reason for that went back centuries. A quick review, reminds us of how the Samaritans at the time of Jesus were what Jews considered half breed descendants from the northern kingdom. When the northern kingdom fell to Assyria in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BC some Jews were taken away as captives, some remained in the land and intermarried with foreigners. These half-Jewish and half Gentile people became known as Samaritans. Then years later after the return from Babylon some Samaritans tried to hinder the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Most Jews considered them worse than pagans. While their differences seemed insurmountable they did share a common heritage. The Samaritans had a different version of the first five books of Moses, yet both groups believed look for an anointed one based on Deuteronomy 18:15. "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet, like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet."

In this reading, Jesus was returning to Galilee from Jerusalem. They had chosen a more direct route to make better time. By noon Jesus was tired, so he sat down by a well that tradition connected with the patriarch Jacob. While he was resting, the disciples went into a nearby city to buy food. It should be noted how John often reminded his readers of the humanity of Jesus, so he includes how Jesus is tired after a morning walk.

John then tells of how a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Often overlooked is the time of day this person came to get water. The women of a town usually came to its well with their water jugs fairly early in morning before the sun got too hot. This basically tells us that she was either too busy earlier or she purposely avoided others. Chances are it was the latter because of what we learn in the conversation she has with Jesus.

We cannot fully appreciate the boundary Jesus crosses when He asks her for water. It was unheard of for a Jew to even acknowledge a Samaritan man and yet Jesus starts this conversation. She responds and soon they have a religious conversation about “living water.” This lady knows the history of the well and also seems knowledgeable about her beliefs. We hear that term “living water” and we probably understand the context of it. But at the time people used that phrase to mean a stream or river, water with a flow to it instead of to water in a well. She doesn’t get what Jesus is saying at first. She thinks of the water just describe that will require less physical work to get it.

Then in the next part of their conversation she perceives Jesus as a prophet because He knows about her personal life. It is then she begins to understand the living water Jesus is describing. There are many references to thirsting after God as one thirsts for physical water in the Hebrew Scriptures. Perhaps the two best known are Psalm 36:9 where God is called the fountain of life and Jeremiah 17:13 where God is called the fountain of living water. Now Jesus tells how He is Messiah who will bring this living water to all.

The disciples were not present at this time. I have wondered if Jesus told John about this conversation later or how John included it. That really doesn’t matter, I guess, but what does matter is how Jesus tells about the kind of life God wants for everyone. And by everyone He means everyone, even a shunned Samaritan woman. God wants all to experience the “living water” of life, a way to live in deep harmony with God’s purposes.

This outsider realizes she is speaking to the one to come, the Messiah and her life changes.

There is a lesson here for us today of course. Think for a moment of what you would consider “living water” in this life. Another way to think about it is what brings one an abundant life. Chances are we would describe a life that one finds fulfillment developing the talents we possess while building a strong relationship with God. That is what Jesus is describing here.

We can easily be swayed by the many influences around us though. Many are trapped in the world of consumerism and think an abundant life is found in the accumulation of possessions and wealth. Others strive for power and influence in big and small ways. And still others view seeking pleasure and enjoyment of our time on earth as the way to live. I know I speak of this often, but whether we realize it or not we are greatly influenced by the times we are living.

Tom Brady is a name just about everyone recognizes. He is a 5 time, MVP winner in the seven winning super bowl teams he quarterbacked. He tells in his book, The TB Method, about a moment after winning his fifth Super Bowl. Standing on the podium, surrounded by celebration, he experienced a surprising wave of emptiness. Despite achieving a feat that most athletes only dream of, a nagging feeling persisted – a sense that something was still missing. While there is much more to this story and the direction his life and priorities have taken, this example from one of the greatest athletes of recent times, does help one realize how even the most successful people in the eyes of the world know there is more to life. Yet there is more to our story, something often overlooked.

John 4: 27-38 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?” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

“My food,” said Jesus “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. 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.”

What I just read could be called “The Disciples at the Well.” While I don’t want to be too critical of the disciples they truly missed a great opportunity. This reading tells how surprised they were but did not ask about this encounter. Neither did they follow-up with what Jesus had started. This woman then leaves her water jar and goes into the town telling what she has learned.

If one reads between the lines, one might conclude how Jesus is disappointed. I say that realizing that when one infers something it can be taken the wrong way, just like when one assumes something.

I guess one time there was a woman who invited her neighbor to dinner. After the meal and conversation, she asked, "Did you like what I cooked?" Collecting his thoughts for a moment, the neighbor said, "Absolutely, it was delicious. Especially that dish you didn’t follow the recipe for—it really made it special."

I’m sure Jesus was hungry yet, He replies, “I have food you know nothing about.” The disciples are confused; they think someone else may have served him.

This was not the case. One could conclude Jesus is unhappy. He has set an example for them to follow and they do nothing. They insist He eat something. Jesus shares how His food is to do the work of Him who sent Him. Maybe He was thinking of the conversation He had had and now wanted to make the same point about the need for spiritual food just like water. He goes on and tells how the harvest is plentiful yet the disciples do not see it. They are locked into the stereotypes and restrictions of this time.

So as we consider this passage in our own time, let us ask ourselves, “Who are the Samaritans of today? Whom does our society hold grudges against and not associate with in any way, shape or form? This is a lesson from this reading today. It calls us to examine ourselves and question why we might not think the message of the gospel is for everyone.

The other day at one of my part time jobs a coworker made a comment just out of the blue. He said, “I’m really worried about the way things are going, there is so much wrong in the world.” I agreed and had a chance to share.

While others may seek the accumulation of more stuff and money, more status and power, self-satisfaction, pleasure and so on, Jesus offers the “living water,” that will not disappoint. Our call is to live accordingly and share what Jesus taught.

This is exactly what the Samaritan woman did. John concludes this reading on how many Samaritans came to believe. And that is the challenge for us today as always to overcome the barriers that seem to be everywhere: Barriers that prevent the sharing of the good news of the gospel. We have this great example from our reading today. May God help us overcome the restrictions we might have as we seek to be better disciples. Amen.