

“Seeking Answers”

John 4: 1-30

Today our Scripture is one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. And because it is so well-loved, we know what happens in this text from John. We know the plot line. We even know the “catch phrases that bring images to our minds that offer us comfort and hope: “living water” and “never go thirsty again”. We know this story. We know the ins and the outs of this story

However, even we will admit that there are some things that we don't know or things that we assume about this story and every time we read it, we have some leftover questions. We want to know more about this woman: What's her name? Why does she come to the well at noon? Why does she have five husbands? Why does Jesus talk so long to her? Why does she wonder if Jesus was the Messiah? Why do the people believe her? All of our questions leave us wondering about this woman. We read this text and sometimes it feels like we have more unanswered questions than we do answered ones. Sometimes, it feels like this text leaves us wondering. Sometimes, it feels like each time we come to this text, we come seeking answers, answers to our questions about this woman, answers to our questions about Jesus, answers to our questions about why it was so important that

John shared this story, answers to our questions about what this story has to say about our faith.

Even though his story is well loved and well known, it still leaves us with lots of questions. Questions that we come seeking to find the answers, just like the woman at the well.

And just like the woman at the well, we are invited to open our eyes and our hearts and really see and understand that we have been asking the wrong questions, every time we have come to this text, that we have been focusing on the wrong thing every time we have encountered Jesus in this wonderful text. The great thing about this text is that, John invites us to see that although we are seeking and searching for the Messiah, we miss him because we have limited our concern and our focus to the details of this woman's life. John wants us look at what is really going on in this story and pay attention to the interaction between Jesus and this woman at the well because it is in their encounter together that the true nature, that the true Messiah is revealed, revealed to the woman at the well, and revealed to us every time we read this Scripture .

John wants us to see this woman, not just as another woman that Jesus helps, not just as a woman who plays a part in a story. John wants us to see that through her encounter with Jesus, she is seen and embraced for the first time as a child of God, in need of love, in need of redemption, in need of grace, not because of her

past, but simply because she is one of God's very own. John wants us to understand and embrace this wonderful knowledge that through this encounter with this seemingly ordinary woman, we are also being given the chance to be seen as God sees us, as the people that God created us to be, as people in need of love and in need of grace. Just like the woman at the well, we are being given the opportunity to be seen, not as the world sees us, not seen because of our past mistakes or assumed notions that this world may hold about us, but seen as a child of God, forgiven, loved and free.

By telling us this story and intentionally leaving the woman, non-descript, John invites us to see ourselves in her and to seek the real answers to our questions: Can Jesus love me in just the same way? Will Jesus really see me just for me? Can I really hope that this one who is the Messiah will really love me for me?

Through this text, John invites us to seek the answers to the questions that we have about why Jesus is different, to seek the answers to the questions that we have about why we call Jesus the Messiah, to seek the answers to the questions that we have about why Jesus calls us to see others and to love others as he see us and as he loves us.

By really making the woman at the well a minor character in this story, John invites us to seek the answers and gain understanding as to why Jesus behaves the

way he does. John wants us to seek the answers and to deepen our faith as we come to grips with why Jesus approaches someone who society as deemed as untouchable. John wants us to seek the answers and to grow in our relationships with God and with one another as we wonder, just like the woman at the well, what it means that we say Jesus is the Messiah, the one who has been promised to God's children, the one who will bring healing and wholeness, the one who will bring peace and justice, the one who brings hope.

Like the woman at the well, when we encounter Jesus, we begin to ask questions, we begin to seek understanding in his answers, we begin to experience the living water that renews, refreshes, and revives our very souls. Like the woman at the well, we encounter the Messiah, and we are changed forever.

John opens the story with the image of a travel weary Jesus sitting by the well, waiting for his disciples to return. And along comes a woman to the well. Really nothing unusual about this picture except that John is quick to point out that is noon, not the normal hour for gathering water. So as readers, we already know something about this woman. She is an outsider and not embraced or welcomed by those in her community. The story continues as Jesus asks for a drink of water from this woman. And once again, nothing unusual about this: a travel weary person needing water except that John is once again given us the detail that this woman is Samaritan and we know that Jesus is Jewish. Two different backgrounds,

two groups of people that didn't get along, two groups that avoided contact with each other as often as possible.

And as we read on, we learn that this woman has had five husbands, pretty scandalous in those days, and now she is living with a man who is not her husband, once again, scandalous in that community at that time.

All of these things: the fact that she comes to the well at noon, the fact that she is a Samaritan, the fact that she has a supposed reputation, add up and we begin to ask ourselves, Why is Jesus talking to her? Why does Jesus associate with her? Why doesn't Jesus avoid her like the rest of her community?

And then all of a sudden we realize that we have our answer to these questions and more: Jesus talks to this woman because he is Jesus, the one who is God's presence among the people, the one who came to show us how to love.

One can almost imagine the glee on John's face when he realizes that we are now asking the right questions. He doesn't want us to be too concerned about the specifics of the woman. He left her vague intentionally so that we could see ourselves in her. That woman could be me. That woman could be you. That woman could be that person in our community whom everyone ignores.

Our questions and wonderings about the woman are not important to the story line. What makes her important is that she needs redemption. Not because

she is bad, not because she didn't live life correctly, not because she has a reputation.

For John and for us as readers, as people of faith, these details of the woman's story are not important. What is important is that she needs redemption because she has lived a life "that has been lived in pieces: broken relationships, unsuccessful marriages, social oppression, poverty and town gossip." What is important is that she needs redemption because she is not seen by others as God's child, as God's very own.

instead of asking Why her? What makes her so special, Why did Jesus speak to her, John is encouraging us to ask "Why not her? She deserves grace, she deserves redemption, she deserves to be seen as a person not because she repents. She deserves all these things because she is a child of God. She deserves all these things because like us, she was lost and now she is found. She deserves all these things because she is claimed and named as God's very own. And if she deserves it, so do we because like the woman at the well, we are also God's very own.

The wonderful news that John shares with us this morning is that as we continue to seek the Messiah, our faith grows more and more, with each encounter with Jesus, we gain understanding and we begin to become the person that God created us to be. With each encounter with Jesus, we let go of our notions of how the Son of God is supposed to act, what the Messiah is supposed to do, and we

open ourselves up to the possibilities and the understanding of who the Messiah really is, we open ourselves and our hearts to the promises of what the Kingdom of God can be here on earth.

Because with each encounter with the Messiah, our questions are answered and we realize that the true Messiah, the one we call Jesus Christ, is the one in “whose presence [we] know who [we] really are, the good and the bad, the all of it, the hope in it. The Messiah is the one who shows [us] who [we] are by showing [us] who he is: the one who crosses all boundaries, the one who breaks all the rules, the one who drops all disguises, and speaks to us like someone we have know all our lives.”

Because with each encounter with the Messiah, our questions are answered and we realize that we are called to see others as God sees us. We are called to answers the world’s questions of Why would someone love me? With the answer: Why wouldn’t someone love you? You are God’s very own.

We are called to answer all the doubts and fears that people have with the one answer that first brought us peace, that first brought us grace, that first welcomed us home: We are called to say: She is God’s own. We are called to say, He is God’s own. We are called to say: We are God’s own. And that is why Jesus talks with us. That is why Jesus walks with us. That is why Jesus offers us a drink of living water. That is why Jesus crosses the boundaries and breaks the rules. That

is why Jesus behaves the way he does. No one is to be left out. Each and everyone is special, named and claimed as God's very own.

We are God's own, claimed and named as God's beloveds.

And that is the only answer we need as we journey along through life. That is the only answer we need as we experience life's ups and downs. That is the only answer we need as we are invited to encounter the Messiah and drinking the living water he offers: We are God's own, redeemed, renewed and free.

May we continue to seek the Messiah and gain the answers to our questions, answers that bring us hope, that bring us peace, that bring us love. Amen.