

Scriptures

John 4:5-26, 39-42

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A 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.) ⁹ The 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.) ¹⁰ Jesus 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."

¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but 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." ¹⁵ The 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."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They 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."

Message: God's Eyes

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

I'm going to be quite brief this morning – I have a very simple message drawn from this morning's two passages. We can't know ourselves until we know God; we can't know God until we know ourselves, and in both cases it is God who does the revelation.

Let's begin in Exodus. It's a familiar refrain – the Israelites were in the desert complaining. After all the miracles they witnessed in Egypt, the defeat of their enemies, the clear presence of God among them as a pillar of fog and fire, the daily provision of Manna – despite all the signs that God was caring for them, they were complaining.

Granted, what they wanted was important. When you wander in the desert water is critical – they aren't going to last long without it. But the thing to notice is that the people did not ask God to provide water, nor did they ask Moses to approach God on their behalf.

Instead, they grumbled. They complained and moaned among themselves, getting themselves all worked up about their hardship, until when they finally did come before Moses it wasn't with requests or suggestions, but accusation and animosity.

We've all seen this behaviour before – once people get it in their heads that they've been wronged somehow they are no longer looking for solutions – they're just looking for someone to blame.

Moses, afraid he was about to get lynched, cried out to God 'What am I going to do with these people?'

God's response was 'Take some Elders, some reliable witnesses, and find me standing on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and I will release water enough for everyone.'

Let's have a look at what happened. The people forgot who God was – the provider. They forgot who they were – God's precious chosen people who were to be a blessing to the world. Not knowing who God is and they were, they freaked out.

God's response is revelatory. Rather than chastising them, he provided for them. It's like giving a child having a temper tantrum a hug. When a child is screaming and throwing things they certainly aren't deserving of love, but the act of hugging shows them that they are lovable despite the way they are behaving.

This response reveals the loving providence of God. It also exposed the nature of the Israelites – God simultaneously showed them that they were precious and worth loving, while also allowing them to see how faithless and petty they were being. Through this episode, those who reflected on their own actions in the light of God's actions got to know themselves as both sinners and saved. Their new knowledge of self informed their understanding of God; there was enlightenment all around for those who had eyes to see.

Hold that thought while we move on to the woman at the well.

The woman at the well, like the Israelites in the desert, was in a state of rebellion. She belonged to a people who had rejected God and had embraced other gods instead. Of these people who were far away from God, this woman in particular was living in a way that even her own people rejected.

She was at the well at noon. Water is collected in the morning for cooking and cleaning; not at lunchtime. This woman came late to avoid the other women – she was a rejected person among a rejected people. She was a sinner among sinners.

Let's hear her story in some different words. [Play video: Known and Loved by Erin Knight Hailey]

I see the same pattern being repeated here that we saw in the Exodus story. Revelation. Revelation of self, which leads to revelation of God through the self's enlightened eyes. It is only when the woman sees herself in God's eyes is she able to recognize who God is.

Jesus treated her as God treated the Israelites – with patience, love, and forbearance. He revealed her sin, while at the same time declaring her to be worthy of his love. You'll notice that it is only after Jesus described her as both sinner and saved – just like the Israelites - that she was able to recognize Jesus as Messiah.

There's that double revelation again.

The truth is, our identity is bound up in God's identity, which should come as no surprise as we are made in God's image. God's identity is also bound up in our identity. God has chosen this for himself and for us; in the incarnation God has declared that he will ever be God with us. He has taken humanity into himself as part of his being.

Two stories of revelation. Two stories of identity. God commanded Moses to strike the rock to release water for the Israelites to drink. Jesus offered the Samaritan woman at the well the living water of eternal life. The Israelites didn't deserve their water, neither did the Samaritan woman. But our God is a God who gives because of who he is, not because of who we are.

These two stories also apply to us. While we are still sinners, God comes to us. In the desert wastelands, in the day to day activities of life – drawing water, buying groceries. When we are toddlers throwing tantrums because we can't have our way, God approaches us, loves us, and blesses us.

Jesus speaks to each one of us individually. Even as he reveals our sin to us he reveals his love and purpose for us – he tells that we are called to greater things than we can see, and reminds us that we were made to be powerful and free human beings, not beholden to our present circumstance, but image bearers of the Almighty God.

Each of us are both loved and flawed; God offers us grace, redemption, the ability to rise above our limitations, and the opportunity to share this experience with those around us.

Every saint has a past; every sinner has a future. God is present through all of it.

I speak to you this morning in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.