

John 4.[3]5-42
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John 4:3-42

Jesus left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria.

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."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'?" But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

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."

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The direct route from Judea to Galilee
 is through Samaria,
 but Jewish people of that time
 would go *around*
 rather than *through* Samaria.
 The hostility between the two races
 was that strong.
 The evangelist, John, says Jesus “had” to go
 through Samaria,
 but that necessity is more about
 theology than geography.

This is a story about breaking down barriers.
 Jesus crosses gender taboos,
 religious differences,
 and ethnic boundaries.
 He dismantles all that separates us —
 from the earth,
 from each other,
 and from God.

Just one page-turn back,
 Jesus began his public ministry
 in Jerusalem
 by turning the temple market
 upside-down and
 chasing out all the traders and their animals.

That whole episode (which is in all four gospels)
 alludes to a Hebrew prophet's vision
 of the day when
 “there shall no longer be traders
 in the house of the Lord of hosts,”¹
 a day when every cooking pot
 in every house will be as holy as
 the bowls in front of the temple's altar.

The absence of the traders
 signals a time when everything,
 everyplace
 will be incorporated into

¹ Zechariah 14.21

the full holiness of the temple.
 A day when the temple's holiness
 will overflow it's boundaries like
 "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."²
 There will be no layer of separation
 between God and humanity.
 There will be no distinctions
 between people or places,
 insiders or outsiders,
 sacred or profane.
 Zechariah's vision
 is God's vision
 for our world,
 for the whole comes.

That Jesus would talk to a woman in public,
 especially a woman he doesn't know,
 is a surprise to both
 the woman and the disciples.
 That she's a Samaritan
 and he's offering to share
 anything at all with her,
 especially to drink
 from her water jar,
 is unheard-of.

She's intrigued enough
 by the conversation,
 and by Jesus' intuitive
 knowledge of her,
 that she sees him as a prophet.
 I think it's impressive that she
 challenges him with
 the ancient argument
 between Jews and Samaritans
 about where *proper* worship happens —
 for her people, proper worship
 can happen only on Mt. Gerizim;
 for his people, it's only in Jerusalem.
 Jesus dismisses all that,
 saying the time will come

² John 4.14

when *neither* place
 will be regarded as
 the place of worship.

Again he channels
 the Hebrew prophet, Zechariah,
 envisioning a new day
 when holiness will overflow
 conventional boundaries and
 reconcile even ancient enemies.
 Both Jews and Samaritans will
 worship God in spirit and truth,
 and all those old religious arguments
 will be beside the point.

From this we could infer that
 God doesn't care about the place
 or manner of worship.
 We are the ones attached to place and form.
 God is not impressed by all that
 but is drawn to a spirit
 with a motivation
 that's open and
 sincere and true.
 It's in that spirit and truth
 that real relationship
 is formed.

There's nothing conventional about
 what Jesus is up to here —
 crossing barriers,
 bridging divides,
 setting holiness loose into the world.
 We shouldn't be surprised
 by his puzzling use of water
 as a metaphor for eternal life.
 So let's talk about eternal life.
 Jesus connects eternal life to
 a natural, earthly element
 without which we can't *have* life.
 Eternal life is earthly.
 It's now. Here.
 And Jesus actually *defines* it
 in chapter 17,
 when he prays for all the disciples —

the ones with him at the time
 and all future ones
 who would come to believe
 through their witness.

Here's what he says:

"...and this is eternal life,
 that they may *know you*,
 the only true God."³

This is eternal life.

It's relationship.

It's that the world may know.

Jesus brings this water of eternal life,

this water of *relationship*,

and gives it to the Samaritan woman,

who then takes it to her village.

She becomes an apostle,

a witness to all her neighbors.

Because of their *relationship* with her,

they believe her

and run out to find Jesus.

They invite him to stay with them.

And he *does* stay, for two days!

(Another ethnic and religious barrier
 trampled down.)

In that time spent together,

relationship is formed, and

through their *relationship* with him,

they come to know

the one true God

and Jesus Christ whom God sent.

And they believe

that he is truly

the *Savior of the cosmos* —

the *Savior of the whole world!*

This spring of water gushing up

to eternal life is universal.

Water goes where it wants to go.

It doesn't conform to human

expectations or conventions.

³ John 17:3

It flows everywhere,
 to everyone and
 every religious expression.

(Notice, Jesus doesn't tell
 the people of Samaria
 that now they have to become Jewish.
 And there's no Christianity yet,
 so they obviously don't
 have to become Christian.)

It's a spring of water gushing up,
 overflowing boundaries and taboos,
 to initiate relationships among
 all spirits that are open
 and sincere and true
 enough to be aware of it.

And the source of all this water,
 all this gushing life,
 all this relationship,
 is the only true God.
 Who knows no limits.
 No boundaries.

Have you ever wondered
 how world peace
 could ever happen?
 It can only come about through *relationship*.
 Through spirits that are
 open and sincere and true.
 Spirits freely shared,
 with no conditions,
 no conformity.
 Everyone with all their diversity,
 ethnicities,
 and religious expressions
 all coming together in spirit and in truth
 around life —
 life that is at once
 eternal
 and now —
 all coming together
 in all the names
 by which God is known.