

Praying with Scripture and the Psalms: Meeting Jesus at the Well

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Hi, I'm Sarah Christmyer. Thank you for joining me again. In the last couple of sessions, we talked about our thirst for God, but did you know that he thirsts for you? In two sense of the word, actually, He thirsts for you and that He desires you. He longs for your love in return. But He also thirst in order that you will thirst for Him because He knows that only in Him are you going to find true satisfaction of your own desires. You're made for Him. So that brings me to one of my favorite gospel passages, which also is the gospel that we'll be listening to on the third Sunday of Lent this year. And that is of the Samaritan woman at the well.

We're going to take a look at that and then we're going to reflect on a very beautiful Psalm, Psalm 139, which is all about God's incredible love for us. So before we begin, let's pray. I'd like to pray. This is a prayer I pray every day, actually. It's a prayer to the sacred heart of Jesus.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Most merciful and gentle heart of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, we beseech you to draw us to yourself. Unite our hearts to yours. And may your Holy Spirit be a river of living water flowing from within us. In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jacob's Well

Can I ask you a kind of a personal question? How's your love life? Okay. I know. None of my business. But I feel like we are asked to consider that, each one of us, as we go through Lent preparing for Easter, just as part of our own self-examination. Are you loved and do you love? Who are you loved by? Where are you looking to receive love? These are all really, really important questions. And in John 4, Jesus takes us to Samaria and he sits by Jacob's well, which in the Old Testament is a place of love.

It's a practical choice for him, I guess, given that he's been on a long journey and he's tired, and hungry and thirsty, and so on. But it's also suggestive because Jacob met his future wife, his most beloved Rachel by a well. And also the wives of Isaac and Moses were found by a well. So, love might be in the air, you might think. Only Jews don't mix with Samaritans. And this is a well in Samaria. So anybody Jesus is likely to run into here, he's not really going to be having much of a conversation with. And they also don't share drinking vessels.

So they're not going to be sharing a drink of cool water. Also, women do not come by the well in the middle of the day. It's hot, really hot. And traditionally, the women would gather in the morning and the evening, and it would be their time to be together, and they're drawing water for their households, but also just spending time catching up with whatever's going on.

The Samaritan Woman

So, Jesus is pretty assured of being alone at this point in the day as he sits beside the well. And then a woman does approach. Interesting. And here is somebody who truly is unlucky in love, if anybody is. You know, she's been through five husbands already and is living with somebody who's not her husband. We don't know if those husbands died, maybe like Sarah in the Book of Tobit or whether she's divorced. But we do know that five times she's been to the altar, probably with all the hopes and dreams that you have when you get married. And those hopes and dreams have been shattered as that ended.

So whether, as I said, whether from death or whether from divorce, can you imagine the pain that this woman is in? So much so that she's not even married to the man who she's living with. A very strange situation for the first century in that part of the world. Imagine also the loneliness, the rejection, the isolation. Why do you think she's coming to get water in the middle of the day instead of when all the other women are there? Maybe they gossip about her, maybe they're mean. She doesn't want to face any of their questions for whatever reason. Here she is, going alone to get her water. But somebody is there and he's waiting for her.

Jesus uses his own thirst to capture her attention. "Give me a drink," he says. And it's such an outlandish request, because as I said, Jews don't talk to Samaritans. Men don't talk to unknown women. Jews don't drink from Samaritans' water vessels. So she perks up. What's he doing talking to me? And she starts interacting with him. "You are asking me," she says, "Why?" And that really gives him the opening that he's been waiting for. "If you knew who I am," he says, "You would ask me and I would give you living water. Water you'd never have to come back for. Water of eternal life, really."

And she hears that and just practically begs him, "Oh, give me that water." Because she is so tired of coming day after day, in the heat of the day, to this well, to get water that runs out and doesn't last. And I think that her daily trips to the well really mirror her multiple tries of relationship. She has been trying to quench her thirst for love for years, and it's just coming up dry. Nothing is ever enough. But Jesus is thirsty too. And He's not just thirsty for water, is He? His deepest thirst at this moment is that this lonely woman would find her rest and her fulfillment in Him. He knows that it's not only water that she needs. And so he says to her, "Interesting request." He says, "Well, go get your husband," when she asked for water. Get your husband and come back.

Ouch. That's painful. He uncovers, really, her wound. Brings it out in the air. She kind of changes the subject, but he skillfully keeps bringing it back to what he wants to talk about, because he has known all along. He's known her pain. He knows her disgrace. He knows also that the very thing that isolated her from others and that has caused her so much pain has brought her to that well where he's met her, where he's waiting, where he's longing for her. She says, "They say when the Messiah comes, he'll show us all things." To which he replies, "I am He. I am the one that you've been waiting for." And there we have it. Here's the whole reason that the divine bridegroom has gone to this well in Samaria in the heat of the day and waited thirsty for this sole thirsty woman. He has done all of that so that she would find him in her longing.

The woman at this point runs off. And I love it. She leaves her water jug behind, and neither of them has had anything to drink, but they don't seem to need it anymore. She doesn't. She runs off to the town no longer in need, no longer ashamed. She just goes and tells everybody who she just met and calls them to come and meet him. So where she had gone to a well thinking that all love was lost, she found a love that would never ever end. You don't have to be a woman to relate to this story. In fact, you don't have to be divorced, you don't have to be widowed or even unlucky in love. All of us at the root, whatever our situation is, like this woman, the desire for God is written in our hearts.

A Desire for God

It says in the catechism, number 27, the philosopher, Blaise Pascal, described our soul saying, he said to have called it a God-shaped vacuum, a kind of infinite abyss that can only be filled by something infinite, by the infinite God who made it. That woman at the well is everybody who tries to fill that infinite abyss, that God-shaped vacuum in their soul, with a spouse or a child, or a better house, or an education, or a big garden, or whatever it is. There are so many wonderful things in this world, but they cannot fill us. They can't fill that God-shaped vacuum that's meant for God. But in the desert of Lent, Jesus is waiting to meet us. Where?

By the well of our longing. Just like the woman's desire and longing, and hurt, and pain led her to that well in the middle of the day, allow your longing to lead you to Jesus, because he's waiting there to fill you with himself. Going forward at the end of Lent, on Good Friday, we are going to go to church and we are going to hear the Lord cry out, "I thirst." And I challenge you or encourage you to hear that cried out to you. I thirst. You know, do you know the gift of God and who it is who is asking you for a drink? I thirst. Jesus is calling for you. He thirst for you.

Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. You may know this. She was so taken by the thirst that Jesus had for her, that she had those two words written up on the wall of her chapel. I think it's in all the chapels of her communities all around the world. I thirst, up right by the crucifix, so that they remember his thirst for them. And I think that's a really good image to keep in mind as we approach Holy Week. And in the meantime, let's pray together with that Psalm I mentioned. Here's King David. He wrote it at a time when he was really overwhelmed with the love that God felt for him. And it's a wonderful one for us to just remind us how much he loves us. But it's especially good to pray with if you have any doubts that God loves you or you all have been looking for love in all the wrong places, and you feel unloved and you really need to be assured of the love that God has.

Psalm 139

Pray with Psalm 139. It's kind of long, so I'm not going to stop and pause in the middle as I do in the other sessions. I'm just going to pray with it. And so maybe close your eyes. I'm going to focus on a couple parts of it. I'm not going to read every verse, but I really hope you'll go back and read it later, and just drink it all in and see where the Holy Spirit would lead your heart to respond to him.

So I'll read it through once slowly and then I'll give you a minute to respond at the end in your heart. Let's pray. In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And I ask,

Lord, that you will open our hearts to hear your Word. This Word of your love. And this is, "to the Choirmaster, a Psalm of David."

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. For you formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for you are fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are your works. You know me right well. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God. How vast is the sum of them. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

What word in particular do you hear spoken to your heart? Can you hear and feel? Can you feel his thirst for you? Take a minute to respond to the Lord and rest in his love. Most merciful and gentle heart of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, we beseech you to draw us to yourself. Unite our hearts to yours. May your Holy Spirit be a river of living water flowing from within us. In the name of the Father, the Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

I encourage you to take this whole Psalm to prayer sometime this week. Take it before the blessed sacrament. Read it before sitting in church before mass. So as you're preparing to receive him in the Eucharist, you can be thinking about his thirst for you and his love for you. I also encourage you to spend a little bit of time prayerfully reading through the Samaritan woman's encounter with the Lord. There's a lot of riches in there. It's a really wonderful way to start preparing our hearts to receive the Lord at Easter.

And also, it's a good time maybe to let him put his finger in some of your wounds. We talk about Thomas putting his finger in Jesus' wounds, but He undid the wounds of this woman in order to heal them. And He can do that for you too. So bring your wounds to Him. Bring your emptiness to Him and allow Him to fill you with His love. And I pray that God will richly bless you, especially as you read His Word.