

John 4:5-42^{vvi}

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 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.) 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." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 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." 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." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 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." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." 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?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him,

"Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. 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. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.

For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

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

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."

^v **About the Gospel: John 4:5-42**

This is the second discourse in John on the meaning of Jesus as the revelation of God. The Samaritans were descendants of the peoples settled by the Assyrians in the northern area after the fall of Israel (721 B.C.). These early settlers worshiped other gods as well as Yahweh. After the Jews returned from exile, enmity with the Samaritans developed and persisted. Though later the Samaritans worshiped Yahweh alone, they had their own center of worship on Mount Gerizim.

In response to the woman's questioning, Jesus challenges her to recognize "the gift of God" (v. 10), the "living water" (v. 10) and the Messiah. Water is symbolic of wisdom in the Old Testament. In John, water stands for the Spirit and for Jesus' revelation interpreted by the Spirit.

The woman first recognizes Jesus as the prophet-like-Moses, the figure in whom the Samaritans centered their messianic expectations. She brings up the dispute over the proper place of worship, but Jesus' answer focuses on the important issue-on the response to God's gift of life. Jesus' reply finally invites the woman to acknowledge him as the Messiah.

^{vi} **Reflection and Response**

Whether it takes the form of a drink or a rainbow, an ice crystal or a bubbling stream, water graces our lives in a multiplicity of ways. In the religious imagination, water takes on another level of significance, representing God's powerful involvement with us throughout history-the watery chaos in Genesis from which God created, the flood in the days of Noah, the Red Sea that parted to allow the Israelites safe passage, John the Baptist inviting baptism, the Lord calming angry seas, the water and blood later pouring from his side.

Thus, when the Samaritan woman comes to draw water, her action is highly symbolic. When Jesus engages in theological conversation with a woman, he so shocks his disciples that they are afraid to even ask about this strange behavior. The woman is more forthright: she questions his breaking of Jewish tradition and his scandalous claims.

This meeting stands in direct contrast to the one with Nicodemus. The latter came at night and left confused. The woman comes at high noon, and leaves caught up in Jesus' revelation. Excitedly, she proclaims him to the people of her village. It is as if the fountain within, promised her by Jesus, has already begun to well up. It brings life not only to her, but to those around her.

What is the good news in today's gospel for us? Perhaps in our reflection on it, we should first name our thirsts. Where does our world seem dry and lifeless? Where do we need Jesus' leaping fountain? Identifying the deserts and the questions is not a useless exercise. Paul assures us that our hopes will

not be disappointed. He uses a word that usually refers to water to describe God's love poured out in our hearts.

We are surrounded by this symbol of God's care. Next time we skate or swim, shower or bathe, use an ice cube or water the plants, we can recall the whole world of meaning contained in a tiny drop. The same God who created with water, who cleansed with water, who rested beside water, who drank water and who rode boats in water is with us still.