



A Change of Heart
Part Three in a Lenten Series

Today's readings: Exodus 17:1-7/ John 4:5-26

"*Jesus talks with a Samaritan Woman,*" that's what it says in my NIV Bible. Other Bibles call her *the Samaritan woman*. This was no chance meeting; she is not just any woman. Jesus went to this village, looking for this woman. Our reading starts at verse 5; those knuckleheads at Bible Reading Central always cut the lessons too short! Verse 4 says that Jesus *had to go through Samaria*. Not really. No one has to go through Samaria; the Jews religiously avoided it, so why not Jesus? One reason is this woman.

Nameless to us, not to God

She is nameless to us, not to God. God has heard her cries: he knows each of us, our spiritual pain, our emotional shame and our sorrows. He knows our need for companionship. And, Jesus knows that this woman's heart has been broken many times.

So it is that she comes to draw water in the afternoon—in the heat of the day when everyone else is home. By this time even Jesus needs a nap. She does not expect to find anyone at the well, let alone encounter the Creator of the universe. Grace is amazing because it is usually unexpected.

She is startled, surprised, not the least because the man speaking to her has a Jewish accent. Though tired and hungry from the journey, Jesus initiates a conversation with this woman: he has come here to meet her. With a surgeon's skill he cuts to the heart of the matter; she has been much abused by circumstances, by others, and especially by the men in her life. In the notes I try to give her the benefit of the doubt; we always hear that she is a woman of questionable morals. Let's just say she was unlucky when it comes to love. She's had five husbands and she's working on number six, and perhaps he belongs to another. But nowhere does it say she divorced all of them—some may have expired of natural causes. Some of them may have been real jerks who abandoned

her. John doesn't tell us and we don't know.

But she hurts, her heart has been broken many times. At this point she is callous to the gossip and has grown used to being alone. The evasive conversation she has with Jesus suggests that she is distrustful of him and that avoiding people (and perhaps avoiding intimacy) has become her way of life.

How do you change a person like this? How do you change a heart grown cold? Jesus shows us how; he talks to her, frankly and honestly. He treats her like any other person. It is hard for us to see this from what little that John relates, and the shorter version that is our lesson this morning. By the rules of the day men did not speak in public to women if they were not related to them: a father, a brother, a son, a husband. And, they certainly would not have a meaningful conversation with them about personal matters at a community well.

A miracle in a conversation

But what a friend we see in Jesus! He treats her as his sister. He speaks to her without the usual Jewish disdain for foreigners. He seems to know her past and does not condemn her. He is here not to condemn but to heal, to mend the heart and to restore her soul. He is here to change her heart and life. Here is an example of words we have so often heard, "... God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17)

It is such a simple thing; Jesus does not need to touch her to bless her, to exorcise "the demons" from her. Our Lord does what even you can do, speak to her out of brotherly concern, not judgmentally and not condescendingly. He just speaks to her as a reasoning individual. Jesus' word and the Holy Spirit do the rest. The Spirit heals and restores her confidence. It does not seem like such a big deal but it is. At verse 27 the disciples "*marveled*" that Jesus would talk to a woman. Even she seems a little stunned by Jesus' actions.

By where the reading leaves off you are to understand that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Jewish messiah, "the anointed one." He will take away the sins of the world. This is what you need to know and believe; Jesus is recognized not only as the Jewish messiah, but the Christ, the Savior of the world. Jesus who went out of his way to love this woman can love and change you too!

*A change of heart,
a life born from above*

Jesus has more than answered her prayers. The Bible assures us that he knows our needs and is

swift to care for us—even before we ask. And so Jesus has taken away her pain and sorrow and she feels a lot better about herself.

But there is more than just the restoration of her pride. There is a sudden newness of life. This woman has drunk from the well that is Jesus. He is her Stricken Rock in the wilderness offering refreshing and life-giving water. She has drunk deeply and becomes a spring of water herself. Leaving her jug at the well, she runs to the village—to the very people she used to avoid. Breaking all the rules she tells them she has found the messiah and invites them to Jesus.

That's how it's supposed to work. Each of us encountering Jesus are to become live-giving wells of water. In the name of Jesus we welcome the outcast, befriend the lonely and help the poor. It doesn't demand heroic action, merely the simplicity of love—a love that does not originate within us, but in God. When we love with the love of God, then the healing begins. Then with a change of heart, there is new life.

*Rev Stephen Vogt, Pastor
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hamburg, NJ 07419
www.hamburg.org*